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ETHAN ALLEN'S RIFLES;

OR,

THE GREEN-MOUNTAIN BOYS.

BY W. J. HAMILTON,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

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ETHAN ALLEN'S RIFLES.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE SHERIFF SERVED THE WRIT.

"THIS way, lads !" cried a clear voice ; " I hear the rascal now."

The scene opens upon a steep ascent, in the midst of the beautiful scenery upon Lake Champlain, in what is now the State of Vermont. It was summer, and a single glance at the verdure which clothed the hills was enough to satisfy the beholder that the State was well named when called the " Green Mountain." In front lay the level lake, shining under the rays of the declining sun, bright and beautiful, unflecked even by a single sail.

Behind, the land receded in a gentle slope, gradually rising into rolling land, which continued to ascend until, in the center of the State, it formed the smooth mountain range from which the State receives its name. The country was thinly settled, and the great forests stood untouched by the ax of the settler. A beautiful country ; a land worthy of the devotion of its gallant sons.

The man who, as he had spoken, leaped down from a high bank, into the bridle-road which wound along its base, was a stalwart, strong-limbed young forester, in a dress of green homespun which showed to perfection his powerful frame wearing a coon-skin cap, with three barred tails pendent from its crown. In one hand he carried a rifle, and a buck-skin thong, which passed over his right shoulder and across his breast to the left side, upheld an old-fashioned powder-horn, mounted with silver, and scraped so that the powder was plainly perceptible through the transparent medium. He was as handsome a fellow as you would wish to see, with a frank, open, pleasant face, a clear complexion, and a keen, dark eye. He wore moccasins, as did most of the Vermonters in the

back region, and these were ornamented and beaded in the Indian fashion.

He was followed immediately by three young men, dressed in the same manner as himself, and all carrying rifles.

"Do you see him, Ned?" whispered one.

"I caught a glimpse of him when he passed the creek. I know that old piebald of his among a thousand."

"We ought to know it; the old cuss has rode that horse on a good deal of deviltry in this section. We ought to take him off the boss and lace his sides with hickory; that's what we ought to do," grumbled the other.

"It may come to worse than that, Jack," replied the young man, who appeared to be the leader. "He comes to serve a writ of ejectment on a man that has got his patent from just as good authority as any York colony can give, and he's going to hold it; are you not, James?"

"I rather think I *am*," replied the person addressed, who was the oldest man in the party, being nearly forty years of age. "I've worked my grant according to law, and I'll hold it against any of Tryon's toadies—by the rifle, if it comes to that."

"And the Green Mountain Boys will back you while their powder holds out," said the leader, grimly. "Hush! here he comes. You'd better get out of sight, James."

"I don't like to run from the old thief."

"It's policy for you to keep away. We can take care of him, and, if the fun comes, why then you can come in, of course."

James caught hold of a projecting shrub and swung himself up the bank, just as the head of a horse appeared at a turn of the road, advancing at a slow trot.

"Look at him," said Ned. "Sits his horse as if he was on a rail fence. I say, boys, do you think it would be any crime to shoot that rascal, now?"

"Not much," replied Jack; "but we won't shed blood if we can help it."

The rider now came in full view, and showed a dark-featured, saturnine-looking man, past the middle-age, with pistols in his holsters, and a pair of saddle-bags, stuffed to repletion.

"I'll bet he's got a writ for every settler on the Otter," muttered Ned Fairchild. "Oh, the old rip; how I'd like to break his head. Take it easy, boys, and leave it to me to stop him."

The young men leaned carelessly against the bank, with their rifles ostentatiously in sight, and Ned stepped out into the road, directly in the way of the coming horseman, who looked at him in evident fear, and laid his hand upon a pistol. But, as the young man made no attempt to raise his rifle, he thought better of it, and touching his horse, rode briskly on.

"Good-morning, Doctor Davidson," said Ned, quietly. "Taking a little ride for your health, eh?"

"How do you fare, Edward?" replied the other, in a pompous manner. "I am glad to meet you, for I think you can tell me where James Breckenridge is to be found."

"What do you want of James?" asked Ned, with a side-long glance at his companions.

"Only a little matter of business," replied the rider, who was no other than the sheriff appointed by the New-York Government to serve writs of ejectment against those in the New-Hampshire Grants who did not hold their patents from New York. "You understand, as well as I do, that he is here illegally, and must take the consequences."

A sullen murmur from the young men by the bank was the only reply for some moments.

"You are going to serve a writ of ejectment on James, then?" said Fairchild.

"Yes," was the reply.

"I wouldn't do it, Doctor; upon my honor it isn't safe."

"What do you mean?"

"You will get into trouble, sure," said the other, with a great appearance of candor. "The boys have a way of meeting these writs as personal insults, and if you try to serve one on any man holding a patent on Otter Creek, I won't answer for the consequences."

"You are all scholars of the Allen family, who are apt teachers of rebellion," replied the sheriff. "Now, by the authority in me vested, I order you to assist me, if need be, in serving this writ upon the man Breckenridge."

"I didn't hear what you said that time, Doctor. I've had an affliction lately, and it affects me in a singular manner. When a man asks me to help him serve a writ I can not hear him; I'm very deaf."

"You had better be careful, my lad; this is treason."

"Can't hear a word you say; can you, boys?"

"Not a syllable!" replied the others, with a laugh.

"Then I'll serve it myself, in spite of the Allens and you."

"I heard Ethan Allen say the other other day that if he caught you anywhere on the Otter, he would give you Scripture law—'forty, save one,' and I believe he'd do it."

"Do you think I fear Ethan Allen, you scoundrel?"

"Good words, Mr. Sheriff. I am not a scoundrel, and if you call me by the name again I will pull your nose, as surely as my name is Fairchild."

"John Maltbe, where is Breckenridge to be found?" demanded the sheriff.

"Did you speak?" said Maltbe, placing his hand behind his ear, as if to hear more distinctly.

"Did I speak? By Heaven, you are banded together to insult me. Thomas Nelson, I ask you the same question."

But Nelson was afflicted in a similar manner with his companions; he could not hear a word, and the irate sheriff bounded upright in his saddle, with a pistol in each hand; but in an instant he was dragged out of his saddle, the pistols torn from his grasp, and he was held firmly by the two men, while Ned proceeded to discharge both pistols, and empty the powder from the flask he found in the saddle-bags.

"Bear witness that I am in bodily fear," cried the sheriff.

"You'll have good cause to say that if you stay on the Otter," replied Fairchild. "Let's look over these papers, men! Writ against Breckenridge, Tyler, John Allen, Ira Allen, John Maltbe; ha, here's one for you, Jack."

"The old cuss! And he asks me to help him serve one on Jim!" roared Maltbe.

"If you look long enough you will find a paper for yourself, Mr. Edward Fairchild," said Davidson, maliciously.

"Oh, I don't care to look at it," replied Ned. "Hold on to him, boys. I'm going to make a little bonfire."

"You dare not burn those papers!" shrieked the sheriff. "It is death for you to do so."

"Yes, if they can catch me," said the young man, quietly, as he collected a little pile of dry leaves upon the roadside. "It will take all the men in York colony to carry me across the border."

Davidson, frantic with rage, saw the bold young fellow collect the leaves, light them with a flint and steel, and feed the flame with small twigs until he had quite a blaze. Then he laid on other and larger pieces, until his fire was of sufficient size.

"Hold him tight, boys; he'll plunge like a two-year-old colt when he sees the writs going to glory. I'd give twenty pounds to have Ethan see his face now," laughed Ned.

"You will think of this when I lead you through Bennington with handcuffs on your wrists," hissed Davidson.

"You'll never live to see that day, you old hound," replied Ned. "Writ against Ira Allen. It burns gayly. Here's mine; ha! ha! ha! The idea of serving *that* thing on me! I've a good mind to keep it to remember old Davidson by, the old pill-box. "Keep still, Doctor; you rare round like a catamount, you do."

"I'll make you all pay for this—all—all!" screamed Davidson. "And the day is not far off!"

"Further off than you think, old fox. Here's the last one in the fire, and so you may let him go, boys.

The young men released their prisoner, who stood glaring at them for a moment with eyes which fairly seemed to burn.

"You shall be outlawed for this day's work, and a price set upon your heads."

"They won't set much of a price on *your* scalp, you old thief," said John Maltbe. "Come; we don't want any more of your clack. Climb on your hoss, and git home, and don't let us see you again upon the Otter. It will be all the better for you."

"Don't think it, gentlemen. You shall hear from me again sooner than you think for, and in a way you will not like. Do you intend to rob me of every thing, or am I to have back my horse?"

"You are to have every thing that belongs to you. We are not thieves, Doctor Davidson."

"That is a matter of opinion," replied the sheriff, as he put the saddle-bags on his horse, and mounted. "Good-by, until we meet again."

He rode swiftly away, followed by the derisive shouts of the young mountaineers. But they had made an enemy who would neither forget nor forgive.

CHAPTER II.

MARKS, THE NOTARY, AND THE LADY REBEL.

THE War of the New Hampshire Grants, as it is termed, is, doubtless, familiar to all readers. The two States—or colonies, as they were then called—of New Hampshire and New York, claimed jurisdiction over what is now known as Vermont. The Governor of each colony issued "grants" of lands to settlers, and a bitter conflict of authority followed. Governor Tryon, of New York, tried to enforce the validity of his grants by force of writs of ejectment, by arrest and imprisonment of the New Hampshire men; and a "war" followed which first introduced the celebrated Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys to history. Our story opens in the beginning of these stirring hostilities.

With this prelude, it will be readily seen that the Green Mountain Boys were supporting what they regarded as a just principle, in their own way. The sheriffs had now in their hands writs against the property of every person who did not hold his patent from the colony of New York, and the men of the grants were taking measures to see that they were *not* served.

Doctor Davidson had been appointed sheriff in the vicinity of Otter Creek. A man personally hated before, he was ten times more obnoxious as the tool of a hostile power, and we have seen how well he succeeded in serving the writs he had first received.

Ned Fairchild well realized that he had taken a bold step in stopping the sheriff upon the highway, and that, if he fell

into the hands of the New York authorities, there was little hope for him. But, he had taken his course and knew that the brave men of the New-Hampshire Grants would stand by him, even to the end.

Doctor Davidson rode hard for the rest of the day, and it was near dark when he reached Bennington, the place of his residence. He went at once to his house, and plunged himself down upon a chair and wrote a note, which he sent to Skeensboro' by a black boy, well mounted. This done, he strode out into the town and stopped at a house near the center of the village, and was shown into a sort of office where a man sat at a table writing—a weazen-faced, skinny, dried-up old man, with the cunning eye which is peculiar to certain crafty men. This was David Marks, money-lender, shark, lawyer, and notary, who, by various devious ways, had made himself one of the richest men in Vermont.

“What, Davidson; back so soon? Surely you have not served all those writs.”

“Served them! If you only knew how I have been insulted, David Marks! My blood fairly boils when I think of it.”

“Ha! you don't tell me that they *resisted* your authority?”

“Resisted authority? They don't care the snap of a finger for authority! Ned Fairchild, John Malthe, and Thomas Nelson met me upon the road, just this side of Otter Creek, tore open my saddle-bags and burned every writ before my eyes.”

“Ha! ha! ha! How good that is; my dear Doctor, you can't tell how much this news pleases me. Ned Fairchild too—he! he! Was *he* the ringleader?”

“It seems to please you vastly that I have been insulted, and my authority set at naught.”

“Certainly, it does. Bah! can't you see that these fellows are liable to be taken for robbery on the king's highway? As long as they merely resisted serving the writs, it didn't amount to much, for all the people would uphold them. But, this is robbery—plain robbery.”

“I did not think of that, by Jove,” said Davidson, smiting his thigh. “I will have a warrant for their arrest before I am a day older.”

"That's it; arrest them, and send them to New York, and I'll back Tryon to take care of them. Ned Fairchild I hate as no man ever hated another. Didn't he pull my nose in the public street, call me shark and usurer, and lay his riding-whip upon my back? I swore to be avenged then, and I'll keep my word. I'll strip him of every acre he holds, and hang him, if I can. Why don't you get a *posse* together, and go up there at once?"

"I am going, this very night."

"Very well; and I'll go with you. I must stand by and laugh when you put the darbies on his wrists. I wouldn't miss the sight for a thousand pounds. And now let us go up to your house and drink a bottle of wine, and let me have a look at your daughter. Yah! You ugly, hard-headed old rover; how came you by such a daughter."

"You shall not speak of her in that way, Marks, for I will not bear it," said the sheriff, angrily.

"Shall not? Who is to stop me if I choose to speak? Do you know that I can crush you in a moment, Samuel Davidson? I have only to lift my hand and bring it down with all my force, and crush you to the earth."

Davidson looked doubtfully at the speaker, and wondered if he were man or devil. This yellow, dried up anatomy, this compound of evil age, talked fluently of inspiring love in a young and beautiful woman, and evidently meant what he said!

"You are a strange man, Marks," he finally said. "Now, I have never given you any hope that Laura would listen to you. On the contrary, I fear she despises you."

"I shouldn't wonder if she did just now, but I intend to cure her of *that* before I have done. Such a sweet creature as she is—such a queenly manner, so graceful—so accomplished! I don't think she has her equal in the colonies."

"I know she has not. Look in yonder mirror, David Marks. You see there the face and form of a decrepit old man, prematurely worn, with a saffron face, shriveled skin, hawk nose and gimlet eyes, and you say that you have hope of winning Laura?"

"He! he! he! how complimentary you are, old friend.

I acknowledge that there are handsomer men than I am, but still I say that I have not only hope but certainty."

"Have you spoken to her on the subject, then?" asked Davidson, recoiling.

"No."

"Then you are talking ridiculous nonsense. Now understand me, Marks: I have promised, on account of the hold you have upon me, and which I acknowledge to be great, to give you all the help I can in making my daughter your wife. I do this not because I think you worthy of it, but for a reason best known to yourself. You are to have every opportunity to press your suit, and to use every honorable means to win my daughter. I don't think it promises much, but have your own way, as long as you do not use force."

"That's right; that's the compact, old friend. You have kept it faithfully, because you could not help yourself; but you would throw me off in a moment if you could get your hands upon certain papers I hold."

"Certainly I would."

"How I like that! Frankness of all things is the best attribute of man. Let us go up to your house, and let me see my little wife that is to be."

Davidson cast a furious glance at him, and they rose and walked down to the house, and entered the parlor. A servant brought in wine at the order of the sheriff, and was sent to ask Miss Laura to come in. A light step was heard in the hall, and a musical voice demanded:

"Did you wish to see me, father?"

A girl stood in the open door who well justified the encomiums of the old usurer. She was rather above the medium height in woman, but not too tall, and had a well-shaped, symmetrical figure and a graceful way of carrying her body which nature gives to few women. Her face was beautiful. Ripe red lips, a clear complexion, eyes dark-brown and full of changing lights; her shapely head crowned by luxuriant masses of brown hair. She wore a riding habit, and held a whip in her hand, as if she had just come in. She started as she saw Marks was with her father, and stood tapping her whip impatiently against her habit, without looking at him.

"You do not see Mr. Marks?" said her father.

"How do you do, Mr. Marks?" she said, coldly. "I hope you are well. You should be very careful of yourself in this trying weather; consider your age."

Truly, as Davidson had said, the plans of Marks did not promise much, and the father cast a queer glance at the suitor. But he sat with a grin upon his face which displayed his yellow and broken teeth, and was in nowise disconcerted.

"Always cutting and witty, Miss Laura; will nothing change you?"

"I think not—at least nothing of which I am at present aware. You came back sooner than you expected, father."

"Rather so," said Davidson, flushing. "Do you know, Marks, that this mad girl upholds the settlers in their wicked rebellion against recognized authority?"

"Recognized authority!" cried Laura. "Prove to me, if you can, that it is right to rob a man of his property for the reason that he happened to buy it of one colonial government instead of another! Prove to me that it is justice to force a man to pay twice for the same thing, and I will say that you are right and I am wrong. You can not put down this people or rob them of their lands, father. Attempt it, and you start a fire which only blood can quench."

"Do you think that these fellows dare use force?"

"I know they dare," was the reply. "They are gallant men, and will stand up for their rights, even though blood flowed."

"Do you know that you are advocating rebellion, girl?"

"I am advocating right and justice," was the spirited reply. "Do you think that such a man as Ethan Allen will tamely submit to robbery, even from the hand of a king?"

"What a legislator she would make," piped Marks. "Capital—capital; pray go on, Miss Laura."

She made no reply, and was about to withdraw, when her father called her back.

"I was about to ask the honor of drinking your health, Miss Laura," said Marks. "Do not go away."

"I have duties to perform," replied Laura, haughtily. "You must excuse me."

"I drink to your charming daughter, Samuel," said the

notary, raising his glass, "and may she always retain the frank and open manner which so distinguishes her."

Laura nodded coldly and left the room, and the two men looked at one another for a moment.

"You think I have no hope?" said Marks, at last.

"Not the shadow of hope," was the reply.

"Strange how men differ. I am not a man to strike too soon. I can see that the girl has a stubborn and wayward disposition, and has been allowed to have her own way too much. I intend to change all that when she is my wife."

"Yes, *when* she is."

"I see that you doubt me. Did you ever know me to fail in any thing I undertook?"

"Not often; but this is an exceptional case."

"When I talked to Tryon about the interpretation which should be put upon the king's decree in relation to these New Hampshire Grants, he talked as you do now; but he is as hot to carry out my plans now as a man can well be."

"I own that you are a man of cunning, and generally make your ends meet, but you can not move Laura. That cut she gave you about your *age* was a good one."

"Capital. He! he! It made me laugh when I heard it, and I will mention it to her after we are married. In the mean time, collect your men and get ready to march when the moon comes up, so that we can strike the Otter Creek settlements in the morning before these men have time to gather. I would not like to meet Ethan Allen just now."

"You have the original of the writs at your office?"

"Yes."

"Make out copies of all and go to Justice Bryerly for warrants against those three young ruffians who attacked me."

"That shall be attended to. I think you had better take twenty men with you."

"I'll do that, you may be sure. There are men enough even in this hot-bed of rebellion to do any thing for pay. I will swear them all in as special constables, so that they may have authority."

Marks hurried away to perform his work. The sheriff lingered for half an hour over his wine and then left the house. Scarcely was he out of sight when a young man, who

had been lying concealed in the vines about the window of the room, rose from his place of concealment, and looked cautiously about him to see that he was not observed. Then, clearing the paling which surrounded the house at a bound, he hurried down to a grove by the river-side, where a horse stood, bridled and saddled, waiting for him. Loosening the bridle, he bounded into the saddle, and rode swiftly toward the north.

CHAPTER III.

THE FATE OF THE POSSE.

NED FAIRCHILD and his companions hastily crossed the hills after their encounter with the sheriff, and buried themselves in the forest. They were at once joined by James Breckenridge, who shook hands with them cordially, but did not waste his time in useless thanks. They crossed a belt of woods through an opening in the forest, and entered a shaded glen, where they paused, and Ned, taking a horn from under a fallen tree, blew a gallant blast, which rose and echoed through the forest. It was answered by a similar instrument, a mile away, and that by another, and the echoes seemed to float away in the distance. It called back the times of Roderic Dhu, when :

"He whistled shrill,
And he was answered from the hill:
Wild as the scream of the curlew
From crag to crag the signal flew."

As the sounds receded, Ned turned with a smile to his companions :

"The boys are ready," he said. "Friends, you and I have incurred a heavy penalty, if we dare show ourselves where the myrmidons of Tryon can lay hands upon us. But to reach us, they must pass over a living wall, composed of true-hearted Green Mountain Boys. Tryon shall see that the twenty thousand souls who inhabit these green hills are not the souls of slaves. We will wait for them to come in."

An hour passed on, and men began to drop into the glade, singly and in groups, all mounted, and each bearing the unerring rifle—strong-armed men, with honest but determined faces, clad in the green homespun which they had chosen for their uniform, if uniform it could be called. They came rather noisily into the woods, laughing and jesting among themselves, and playing tricks with one another. At last nearly fifty of them were assembled, and still the men for whom they waited had not come.

"I wonder why Ethan Allen should be behindhand?" queried Ned. "It is not like him to be backward in any good work."

"He will come fast enough," John Maltbe answered. "Hark!"

The tramp of horses' feet were heard; then three persons came out of the woods and rode toward the party, and were greeted by a stunning cheer. They were the men on whom chiefly the hopes of these mountain men rested—Ethan and Ira Allen and Seth Warner, three names soon to become famous in the history of the Green-Mountain State. Foremost of all rode the bold man who, in after times, bearded royalty in its very home, and taught it, by his high example, what a patriot can do and dare. A man of powerful frame, of giant strength, and rare determination, no wonder he was the idol of his men and possessed such a wonderful influence over them.

"Ha, lads," he cried, as he dismounted, "I am glad to see you so ready, and can only account for my own delay by saying that we have only just come in from the lake, where we have been working for the good of the colony. So you must excuse our tardiness."

"I nominate Colonel Ethan Allen as president of this meeting," said Ned Fairchild. "If in favor of that, let us hear from you."

A perfect roar was the response.

"It is idle to call for opposing voices," said Ned, laughing. "Take charge of the meeting, Ethan."

The "colonel" advanced to the center of the glade and seated himself upon a fallen tree. The men grouped in front, some seated upon the sward, some standing at ease leaning

upon their long rifles, while others found seats upon logs and stones.

"What is the occasion of this call?" asked Allen.

Ned Fairchild rose at once and made a personal explanation. He detailed at length that he had been apprised by a personal friend in Bennington that Doctor Davidson, the sheriff appointed by Tryon, proposed to serve writs upon a number of persons along Otter Creek, beginning with James Breckenridge. He told of their meeting with the sheriff upon the road, and the manner in which the writs were disposed of, and sat down amid a tumult of applause.

"Ned, my boy," said the president, "I'd like to hug you, but must restrain myself on account of the dignity of my position. Have any of you a word to say in regard to this important event?"

"Ethan! Ethan!" roared the crowd. "Speak up, colonel."

"You want to hear from me, eh?" said Allen, rising slowly. "Well, I don't know as I want to balk you, for if I ever felt like *blowing* in my life, I feel like it now. What are we, who are we, and who are the men who are trying to debase and oppress us? We are, I hope, honest and God-fearing men, who seek to do nothing unlawful, and whose simple wish is to live upon the land we have purchased with our treasure, reclaimed by our toil, and beautified at our own expense, that our children in after times may bless us.

"Who are these who seek to rob us? A set of the most infernal scoundrels who ever cursed the earth, under the lead of a man who has but one object, and that his own aggrandizement and personal profit. Perhaps you do not know to whom I refer, and I will say that it is Sir William Tryon, by the grace of God and his supreme majesty the King of England, Governor of the province of New-York. Of the king's decree I will say nothing. I am confident, hampered as he is by bad advisers, that he never designed to do an infamous wrong to twenty thousand loyal subjects, when he issued that decree. But, the men who have warped that decree, in such a way as to serve their own base ends, to the small-souled and chicken-hearted petty tyrants who propose to rob us of the fruits of the sweat of our brows, I would

may that the gods of the valley are not the gods of the hills. They may issue their proclamations, their writs and their warrants, but, by the Eternal, they shall not serve them upon any inhabitant of the New-Hampshire Grants while Ethan Allen breathes free air."

He paused, for a perfect tumult of applause from his hearers made it impossible for him to proceed, and he looked on with a smile, while the mountaineers threw their coon-skin caps into the air, and shouted at the tops of their lungs. At last he stretched out his hand in a solemn and impressive gesture and every sound was hushed.

"I feel that you are with me in this, and not a man will be false to his colors. We will nail them to the mast, and this shall be the sign. We will have no trading and trafficking in the property which is ours; we will not permit any man or set of men to serve a writ or summons upon any of our number, and we will protect each other to the last drop of our blood. Tryon shall see that the men of the Green Mountains are not slaves, and that they appeal to arms when all else fails.

"And now a word for my young friend, Fairchild, and those who were with him. You have done well; you have deserved well of your country; you have commenced a struggle which can only end in our ultimate triumph; and, although in doing it, you have laid yourselves liable to punishment, by the laws of your oppressors, you shall not be punished, while we live. Let us now proceed to business."

"Mr. President," said Warner, rising, "this is a good opportunity to complete our organization. I move you, sir, that we form ourselves into an armed society, to be known and distinguished as the Green-Mountain Boys, having the avowed object of protecting our property from the encroachments of another colony."

"Has the motion a second?"

Ira Allen seconded the motion in a powerful speech, and the name was unanimously accepted.

A motion to proceed to the election of officers was then carried. These were to consist of colonel, lieutenant-colonel, and six captains. The vote was commenced, and Ethan Allen

was elected colonel, Seth Warner lieutenant-colonel, and among the captains appeared the names of Edward Fairchild and John Maltbe.

This business being done they consulted for a long time upon their future course. A code of signals was adopted, and a committee of safety appointed who were to take upon themselves the punishment of the refractory among the sheriffs and of the New York men who had accepted lands under the New York patents.

"And now, gentlemen," said Allen, as he rose to dismiss the meeting, "I need not say, be faithful, for your interests are too closely concerned. But I say, be very watchful. Do not, on any account, suffer any deviation from our rules. Watch the signals, and assemble when you hear the sound of the horn. For the present, we have done all that is possible, but there is work before us, and I am persuaded that we shall hear from Doctor Davidson before two days are over. The meeting is now dismissed."

The men broke up into groups and scattered to their homes. Ethan Allen, Fairchild and James Breckenridge rode away together, as the new colonel intended to stay at the house of Breckenridge that night. In half an hour all traces of the Green-Mountain Boys had vanished, save where they could be seen laboring in the fields.

Davidson marched out of Bennington at nine o'clock, that night, at the head of a mounted force of twenty five men. The force was composed mainly of those who had emigrated from New York, and were bitterly opposed to the Green Mountaineers. Marks was with them, his yellow face lighted up with a look of ferocious joy as he thought he was about to be revenged upon Fairchild, who had insulted him. They rode on under the light of the moon, with clanking stirrups and rattling of arms, with Davidson and Marks at their head. When the moon went down they camped upon a slope about three miles from the house of Breckenridge, and waited for morning. About four o'clock Marks awoke, and as he lay half awake he heard a horn faintly blown in the distance, and then another and another.

"What does that mean?" he muttered.

The sounds came from all points of the compass, sound-

ing with remarkable distinctness in the clear air of night. Marks was puzzled greatly, and after a time awoke Davidson, and told him to listen.

"Do you understand it?" he said.

"Tush!" said the sheriff. "Perhaps some youngsters are coming hence from a barbecue somewhere and are blowing their horns for mere sport. Why do you wake me?"

"I think we had better push on."

"Too dark; we can do nothing until morning, and you had better try and get a little more sleep."

"You will spoil all by your laziness, Samuel Davidson," snarled Marks. "But, have your own way, and don't blame me if you find that you are behind time."

"Excuse me if I say that I know my own business best," said the sheriff. "Go to sleep and don't bother me."

Marks could not sleep, but walked uneasily to and fro until it was light enough to move. Then the men insisted upon cooking some breakfast, and it was six o'clock when they were again in the saddle, and riding toward the Breckenridge farm. When they reached the place they found the owner leaning against the door-post, holding his rifle in his hand, and looking at the priming in a suspicious manner.

"Ah, good-morning, James," said the sheriff.

"Good-morning to you, Doctor. Marks, you old scoundrel, what are *you* doing here?"

"Be careful, Mr. Breckenridge," said Davidson. "Mr. Marks is under my protection, and you must not do him any injury."

"Umph. You ride with a strong party, Doctor."

"Your neighbors have made it necessary," replied Davidson. "They set my authority at defiance yesterday, and committed a grave offense against the law. Have you seen any thing of Ned Fairchild, John Maltbe or Thomas Spencer?"

"I saw them yesterday," replied Breckenridge. "I believe *you* met them, just before."

"Take care, sir, or there may be a warrant found for you! In the mean time, by the power in me vested, I will serve a writ of eject—"

At this moment Breckenridge swung himself suddenly inside the door and closed it, cutting the speech of the sheriff short.

"Does the scoundrel defy me, too?" cried the angry official, beating upon the door with the butt of his whip. "Open the door, James Breckenridge; I order it in the name of the law."

"I will not open it," replied Breckenridge, from within. "A man's house is his castle."

"Break in the door," said Davidson. "Bring an ax."

The men hesitated, for they feared James Breckenridge; but Davidson caught up an ax which lay near at hand and struck once upon the door. It swung suddenly open, and out rushed a strong detachment of the Green-Mountain Boys, their weapons ready for a fray. The venal followers of Davidson were not the men to meet such assailants, and they were borne back, loudly protesting their utter disrelish for any thing tending toward a fight, and invoking the majesty of law for their protection.

"Cowards, fools, dolts!" yelled Davidson. "Will you let them master you so easily? I command all here present to assist me in seizing upon the persons of Edward Fairchild, John Maltbe and Thomas Spencer, in the name of the king!"

"The king's name is a tower of strength," said Ethan Allen; "but no king or potentate can make us assist in the capture of these young men, who have done no wrong."

"Ha! are you there, Allen? I might have known you were in this villainy."

"Villainy is a strong word," said Ethan, advancing, with a forbidding look. "I am not the one to take the word villain from any man, no matter who he may be, even if one of Tryon's rascally sheriffs."

"I beg your pardon, colonel," said Davidson; "perhaps I used a strong word, but I did not intend it to apply to you."

"Indeed! Let it pass, however, and we will get along as we can with our business. What do you seek here?"

"To serve these writs upon the persons named in them."

"Dispossessing them of their lands, as I understand it?"

"No; they may take out new patents."

"That is, they can pay again for what they have already honorably paid. It shall never be done, Samuel Davidson; you may take your oath on that."

"It has got to be done, however," piped Marks, "as you and your associates shall find to their cost."

"I had hoped," said Allen, sternly, "that this shark would have had the grace to remain silent. Having forced himself unbidden into the society of honest men, he should make it his business to keep as quiet as possible, and not stir up bad blood. You don't like Reuben Marks too well, I think, boys?"

Derisive groans were the only reply. The mountaineers began to hustle the special constables, and a group of angry faces appeared about Davidson and Marks, regarding them with looks of the greatest hate.

"Beware what you do, Ethan Allen," hissed Marks.

"Down with the shark! Death to the minion of Tryon," cried many fierce voices.

"You hear them," said Ned Fairchild. "I have no reason to love you, Reuben Marks, but I warn you to be silent."

"Devils! I hate you. A curse upon you now and evermore, false-hearted boy."

"You had better be silent. A moment more, the lifting of a finger, and they will tear you limb from limb."

At this moment, unable to bear his presence longer, the crowd rushed at him, tore him shrieking from the saddle, and trampled him beneath their feet.

CHAPTER IV.

A NOISOME BATH AND AN ENCOUNTER.

A SEA of angry faces raged about the prostrate man, and for a moment the bad heart of Samuel Davidson experienced a thrill of joy, as the hope came over him that these enraged mountaineers would destroy the man he so dreaded. But, help came from an unexpected quarter. Ethan Allen and Ned Fairchild pushed their way into the midst of their companions, thrusting them right and left, and stood over the prostrate body of the lawyer.

"Stand back, men—stand back. Death of my life, let me never be ashamed of my Green-Mountain Boys!" cried Ethan.

"An old man, lads, remember," said Fairchild. "A villain, but with gray hairs."

The men recoiled in some confusion, and the two lifted the body of Reuben Marks from the earth. He was senseless, and there was a gash upon his forehead, where a boot-heel had struck him, and his sallow face was masked in mud and filth beyond description. They carried him to the well, and dashed a bucket of water in his face. He came to his senses with a gasp, and shaking himself free, rose, with an angry look upon his face.

"Let me alone, ruffians," he said. "You have done enough—more than enough, and Reuben Marke will not forget."

"Don't let the old thief threaten us," muttered one of the men.

"I am not threatening," replied Marks, calmly, as he wiped the water from his eyes. "I never permit myself to threaten any one, but I simply say I will remember this hour in the days which are to come. Perhaps you may remember it, too, when the time comes."

His tone was calm and even, and he smiled as he spoke, at the same time drying the blood which flowed from his cut

forehead with a cambric handkerchief. Davidson now came forward again.

"Do you refuse to give up these men to me, Ethan Allen?"

"I refuse nothing. There are the men; if you like to take them."

"But they will resist."

"I shouldn't wonder; you can try it, if you think it will pay."

"Down with the scrubber!" roared one of the settlers. "No mercy to Tryon's beagle, Sam Davidson."

Davidson turned pale, as an ominous movement began to be made toward him.

"You had better go," cried Allen. "I give the boys five minutes to boil over in. It won't take longer than that."

"Duck him in the pond," cried the same hoarse voice which had been heard before. The men raised a cheer, and rushed forward. Davidson was quickly seized, and the rest of the posse, turning their horses' heads, fled for dear life down the road.

"Bring him along, lads," said the hoarse farmer. "Ethan, don't you interfere. Ned Fairchild, don't you *lip in*. 'Tain't none of *your* funeral."

"Don't hurt them, boys," said Ethan, who saw how useless any thing like interference on his part would be.

"We'll duck 'em as gently as young lambs," replied the hoarse farmer. "Bring the shark along, you chaps. He needs rinsing out, too."

They dragged the sheriff and Marks to the edge of a dark pool, where the slime lay green and thick upon the surface.

"Remember Baker," said Davidson, "if you disgrace me in this way, I will never forget nor forgive."

"All right, Sammy," replied the hoarse farmer. "You needn't unless you like."

"I have power, and will one day make you repent it."

"Thankee."

"Let me go, and I will not attempt to serve the writ I hold against you."

A perfect roar of laughter greeted this announcement.

"Take hold of him, boys," cried Remember Baker.

"Swing 'em *once*; swing 'em *twice*; swing 'em three times, and away they go."

At the word "away!" the bodies of the victims, under the motive power of twelve pair of strong arms, shot into the air at an angle of fifty degrees, and alighted, with a prodigious splashing, in the center of the deep green pool, sending the slime and water flying into the air, as the gulf closed over their heads.

"Let 'em crawl out," said Baker. "Enough is as good a feast. Let the snakes shin home as fast as they can go."

The two disgraced men dragged themselves out of the pool and stood upon the bank, with the filth of the pool hanging in green masses from hair, beard, and clothing, two as sorry-looking specimens of humanity as ever stood within his majesty's dominions. Neither spoke a word, but shaking as much as possible of the water which clung to their clothing, they walked to the place where their horses stood.

"Room for his worship, Sir Sam Davidson, high sheriff to his high mightiness, Governor Tryon!" shouted one voice.

"Way for the gander-legged chief thief in ordinary to New York!" cried another.

In the midst of these derisive cries they mounted and rode away at full speed, closely pursued by the yells of their enemies, triumphing in their downfall.

"There they go, two of the meanest men who ever cussed the earth," said Remember Baker. "I would hev liked to hang him, but was afraid you wouldn't like it, Ethan."

"I didn't intend that last touch, Baker, replied Ethan. "I am sorry you ducked the sheriff."

"I couldn't help it, Ethan," growled Baker.

"He would not take warning," said Allen, "and he must suffer the consequences. But we have lighted a fire which will burn until our homes are in ashes, and we exiles and wanderers on the face of the earth, or we ride triumphant over our oppressors, bearing them to the earth. God send that it may be the last."

"Let us hope so, Ethan," said Ned, passing his arm affectionately over the broad shoulders of his leader. "We are many and strong, and united in the strong bonds of unity, and we must succeed in the end."

"Who will volunteer to go to Bennington and see how this comes out?" said Ethan.

"I—I—I!" cried half a dozen voices.

"All ready, I see," said Ethan, smiling. "I must choose for myself then. What say you, Ned; dare you go in?"

"I should not wonder," said Ned, with a smile. "I am not likely to be troubled in Bennington. Why, there are boys enough in the village who would tear down any house to get me out."

"They won't dare to touch you, I think, but, at the same time, you may as well keep out of the way."

"Suppose they have sent for troops from Skeensboro?"

"Then bring us word, and we will dust their red jackets for them, as sure as my name is Allen. Let them bring red-coats into the Green Mountains, if they dare!"

"Would you fight them?"

"Would we, boys?" cried Ethan Allen, turning to his men. They answered by a hoarse cry, and a rare smile passed over the face of the sturdy patriot. Let these men be understood. They were not law-breakers, but men as loyal to constituted authority as any who could be found in the broad dominion of Great Britain. But they were people who would demand that their just rights should be respected, and who would enforce their demand in the face of all the world. They stood together, a band of brothers, pledged by solemn ties to stand firm in the great cause of liberty and right.

Smarting under their defeat and disgrace, full of wrath against the mountaineers, and vowing vengeance in their hearts, Marks and Davidson rode into Bennington, amid the imperfectly suppressed derision of the friends of justice, who mustered very strong in the village. They had seen the *posse* ride out vamping as to what they would do if the Green-Mountain Boys dared oppose them, and it was no surprise to them when the terrified myrmidons of Tryon came back the next day, singly and in squads, with their plumage in sad disarray.

"So, so," muttered a sturdy blacksmith named Lyon, as he stood at his smithy door and watched the return of these men. "They went out to fleece and came home shorn. I

would give the price of a week's work if I had been out with the boys, Tim."

His assistant chuckled, and blew sturdily at the bellows, sending the bright sparks flying up the chimney.

"Where were you last night?" demanded the blacksmith, looking at him suspiciously.

"I took a little ride for my health, master," was the reply. "Come closer and I will tell you where I went."

Lyon approached, and, stooping, Tim whispered a sentence in his ear, and a smile passed over his brown face.

"Good lad, good lad! Remember that you are always at liberty for any such service as that, and to show that I mean it, I add sixpence a day to thy wages from this time."

"I thought you would be pleased, master," said Tim. "Look if Davidson and Marks have not come back, and if they have not made acquaintance with a horse-pond, then say my hand is a chicken's claw."

Davidson and Marks rode by. The last turned a savage glance at the smithy door and the two grinning faces in it.

"I suspect yonder blacksmith and his man," hissed the lawyer, with his mouth close to Davidson's ear. "They are grinning like apes at our discomfiture, and I believe that they are in league with Ethan Allen and his crew."

"Let me but catch them tripping once," was the reply. "Nothing would suit me better than to lay that outspoken blacksmith by the heels. Here we are at my house; will you go in?"

"Not now. I will go home and change my clothing, and be with you in an hour. Something must be done, and at once."

They separated, and Davidson entered his house, where he was received by Laura, whose face wore a sort of smile.

"By heaven, I believe that you are secretly exulting at my downfall!" cried her father.

"Not that, dear father," she said, sadly. "I told you before you went out that these brave men would resist."

"Brave men!"

"Is it not brave in them, knowing as they do that they are putting themselves under the ban of the law by the act,

that they resist oppression at the risk of the loss of life and liberty?"

"You are mad, Laura. You should hate your father's enemies."

"So I should, if my father would be just to himself and to them. You should not have accepted this appointment from Tryon."

"It is one of profit."

"Yes—and of odium. Remember that you have cast your lot with this people, and you should go with them, stand or fall, as you may."

"Silence."

"Father, I can not be silent, when I see you associate yourself with such men as Reuben Marks."

"Is he not a loyal man?"

"He is a small-souled, pettifogging robber by nature and profession, and a villain at heart."

"Girl, I will not permit you to insult my friend in that manner. Go to your room, and, as you go, tell Rebecca to bring a change of clothing to my room."

Laura looked sadly at him and retired without a word. He went to his room, chafing with inward fury at the position in which he was placed. He felt that he would be made ridiculous, and by his own act, and that all Bennington would be ringing in an hour with the story of his defeat. A proud man, it cut him to the heart to acknowledge that he had been beaten by men whom he regarded as uneducated boors, and his mind was busy in a plan for vengeance. A black servant came in with a change of clothing, and held up her hands in astonishment at the figure he presented.

"Lordy massy on my soul, massa! What you been doin'?"

"Shut up! Let me hear that you have spoken of this, and you may depend upon a dozen lashes for your babbling tongue."

The negress was silent, and laying down the clothing retired to the kitchen, where she mystified her sable coadjutors for the next hour by going about with protruding eyeballs, uttering short ejaculations of wonder. Their questions were unavailing, for she knew her master well enough to be sure

that he would keep his word in regard to the punishment, if she dared to open her lips.

Davidson dressed as quickly as possible; then drank a glass of wine and took some food, for he had fasted for some hours, being in too great a hurry in the morning to partake of the hastily-prepared breakfast of the posse. Laura had obeyed his order, and gone to her room, and was sitting at the window, when there came the tramp of horses' feet, and two men rode up from opposite directions. One was our friend Ned Fairchild, and the other a rather gaudily dressed, supercilious looking personage in the fatigue dress of a British captain. Laura was looking at Fairchild, whom she had never seen before, and thinking him a splendid specimen of manly grace, when the two met in front of the gate, and the officer spoke to Ned.

"Here, you fellow!"

Ned did not turn his head, and was riding on, when the British officer wheeled his horse and blocked the way.

"Did you hear me speak to you, young man?"

"I thought you were calling some of your flunkies," replied Ned, quietly. "I would have you understand that I allow no man to apply an insulting epithet to me."

"Do you know me, fellow?" thundered the irate officer.

"I have not that honor, and you will excuse me if I say that I have not the slightest desire to be better acquainted with you."

"'Pon my soul, I will thrash you within an inch of your life if you do not at once dismount and assist me to alight."

"And who may you be?" said Ned, quietly. "Perhaps it is just as well that I should know your name, for future reference."

"I am Captain Archibald Skeene, of Skeensboro', an officer in the British service," replied the other, glaring at him. "Now, knowing who I am, I will overlook what you have done if you will hold my horse until I can send a servant to take care of him."

"I can't escape on any other terms, I suppose," said Ned, shifting his bridle to his left hand.

"No, sir. If you keep me waiting for a moment, I will wear out my riding-whip upon your back."

"Just so ; and what would I be doing in the mean time ? You are one of those men whom kind nature has gifted with a head so thick that it would be next to impossible to break it, or I would teach you what it is to insult a man because he wears a homespun coat. You may be the nephew of Colonel Skeene, or the colonel himself, for aught, I know, but you are the greatest fool it was ever my fortune to meet."

Young Skeene raised his riding-whip and struck at the face of the speaker. The next moment it was wrenched from his grasp, broken into pieces and flung in his face, and the owner was rolling in the dust, fairly lifted from the saddle by a powerful blow from the nervous arm of the young mountaineer. Looking up as he struck the blow, Fred was stricken dumb by beholding the beautiful face of Laura Davidson looking down at him, beaming with delight.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACKSMITH'S DAUGHTER.

GRACEFULLY touching his hat to the lady, and without waiting for the discomfited official to pick himself up, Ned rode away, and put up his horse at the village inn, where he was quickly joined by some of his friends, who had seen the encounter, and gloried in the pluck displayed by their muscular companion. All the colonists had not yet got over their feeling in regard to the fire-eating qualities of the British regular officer, who was supposed to live in an atmosphere of duels and slaughter, and they regarded that civilian as a strange phenomenon, who dared meet an insult from one of them as an insult should be met. But such people were scarce in Bennington just now, and not one of those who joined Ned at the inn but would have done the same under like circumstances.

"Do you know him, Ned ?" said Lyon, who had come down with the rest.

"Oh, yes. At least he told me that his name was Skeene,

and that he is the nephew of the colonel of the same name."

"I am afraid you have got yourself into trouble."

"Umph. I ought to have laced his jacket for him, at the first word. Do you know that he wanted me to hold his horse, and called me a 'fellah'?"

"That's good! He did not know you as well as we do, or he would have picked out some other 'fellah' for the work," said Lyon. "You must look out for yourself, however, for there is a warrant out against you. I don't say that the boys would let them take you out of Bennington, but it would be better not to make trouble if we can help it."

"That is true, Lyon. Perhaps I had better get out of the street, as I wish to stay all day, and find out what they mean to do."

"If ever that red-coat gets a whack at you, he'll pay you off for this day's work. Come into the house, and I'll show you a short cut to my place."

The two entered the inn together, and Ned was not seen again in the street that day. In the mean time, Captain Archibald Skeene had picked himself out of the dust with a grievously disarranged dress and a rueful countenance, his face smeared with blood which ran from a little cut over his eye, and that orb rapidly assuming a somber color. Two or three negroes ran out and pursued his horse with yells which only served to send the frightened animal faster down the street, while a crowd of Job's comforters surrounded this discomfited captain, anxious to put forward their theories as to the best cure for a black eye.

"Get out of the way, get out of the way," cried the captain. "Oh, Marks, I am glad to see you. Come into Davidson's at once."

"What is the matter?" said Marks.

"I have been abused, disgraced, insulted by a homespun ruffian, whose name I do not know."

"Who was it?" said Marks, turning to the crowd.

"Ned Fairchild did it," piped a little urchin about three feet high. "He up with his fist and knocked that soger feller clear out of his saddle into the dirt. He's an awful man to hit, Ned Fairchild is."

"Indeed!" said Marks, setting his teeth fiercely. "So he has dared to follow us into Bennington? Where did he go?"

"He went to the Green Mountain," said the boy, "and there's a crowd down there now, a-talkin' about it."

"Are you coming in?" shouted the captain, stamping his foot impatiently, "or am I to be kept exposed to the vulgar gaze all day?"

"I beg your pardon, captain, but I wanted to find out the name of the man who had insulted you. It is a strange thing that this young ruffian and my friends always come in contact, no matter what may happen."

Marks opened the door without ceremony, and led the way at once to the room where Davidson was seated over his wine. He started up in surprise as he saw the officer.

"Captain Skeene!" I am delighted to see you here so soon. But—what is the matter with your face?"

"Show him to a room where he can wash and change his dress before you say a word, and then come back here and I will tell you all about it; be quick."

Davidson showed the captain to the room he had just quitted. Leaving him washing the blood from his face, the sheriff went back to the room where Marks was seated. Rubbing his hands gleefully, he recounted the manner in which the officer had received his injury.

"You seem pleased," said Davidson.

"I am delighted beyond measure," replied the other, with a gratified look. "We wish to enlist the Skeenes in our cause, and nothing will do it so quickly as this insult. Everything is in our favor now, and we will so punish that young dog that he shall wish he had never been born."

"Nothing could have pleased me better. And now for another thing. This young Skeene, saving his presence, is a blockhead of the purest luster, and we can mold him as we desire. Would it be prejudicial to your interests to permit him to fall in love with my Laura?"

"Is he susceptible?"

"To the highest degree."

"Then, by all means, let the moth singe his wings in the flame. If I know any thing of your daughter she will know

when to bring him up short in his advances, and will never be taken by a mere red coat. Go to him, and see that he is in proper feather."

"He shall stay to tea, and in the mean time we will concert measures for getting even with our young friend, Fairchild. It must be done to-night."

He went back to the dressing-room, from which he presently emerged, showing in Captain Skeene, whose face was not made beautiful by a green shade over the right eye, and he wore a crestfallen and sheepish look, hardly to be expected in a bold British soldier. This was heightened by a general appearance of being ashamed of himself, as he undoubtedly was.

"You will take a glass of wine, Captain Skeene?" said Davidson.

"Haw; yes. With pleasure, Mr. Davidson. But can you tell me how I can meet this rascal who knocked me down?"

"That shall be arranged. Of course you will not fight a duel with a man who has a warrant out against him for a criminal act."

"Haw; you don't tell me that!" replied the brave captain, evidently relieved to find that a bar existed which a false code of honor would respect, preventing him from meeting Ned Fairchild again, a thing for which he had not the slightest desire. "I knew he was a ruffian from the brutal manner in which he assaulted me. But we can put the law in force against him, and get revenge in that way."

"Certainly; that is the object with which I sent to Skeensboro'. You must know that this Edward Fairchild is a leading man among the set of ruffians styling themselves Green-Mountain Boys, who are banded together for the purpose of resisting the serving of the writs against the property in the New-Hampshire Grants. Two days ago, as I was out upon the business, he, with two others, stopped me upon the highway, burned the writs before my eyes, and forced me to return. I went out to-day with a *posse*, and we were met by nearly a hundred determined villains, who subjected myself and Mr. Marks to various indignities, and put the *posse* to flight. In the face of the fact that warrants are out against Fairchild and two of his friends, and of the fact that they

were prominent in to-day's proceedings, the rascal had the supreme hardihood to come here after us, meeting and insulting you at my gate."

"He did, the hardened villain," roared Skeene. "Why don't you go out and get a warrant, and take him at once?"

"It won't do," replied Davidson. "You must know that the scoundrel is quite popular among his associates, and many of them reside in Bennington, so that, under the circumstances, it would hardly be politic for us to take him openly. We have thought of doing it in another way, and one which will be quite as effectual."

"Let's hear it."

"Not now. After supper we will talk over our plans, for even my servants are infected with the popular regard for this young reprobate, and would carry information to him which would put him on the alert."

"But really, you know, this looks as if there were no law in this country."

"Law has little effect here. The only thing they will understand will be the appearance of a good force of the red-coats under active officers like yourself."

"Yaas," said Skeene, grinning widely, "of course; and it will come to that some day."

"I hope it may; and now we will go in to supper."

They entered the supper-room, where Laura was seated behind the tea-urn, manifestly restraining with great difficulty a tendency to laugh as she saw the rueful figure of the British captain enter. The remembrance of the involuntary tumble which he had made, and the swift and sudden punishment which had followed his impertinence, were so strong upon her that she was obliged to turn away her head to keep down a laugh.

"Captain Skeene, of Skeensboro'," said Davidson. "My daughter, Laura."

Skeene managed to make the required bow, but he was evidently taken aback by the beauty of Laura. He had expected to see, perhaps, a fresh-faced country girl, with some pretensions to homespun beauty, but not the high-bred damsel who rose to receive his salutation, dropped

him a very graceful courtesy, and sunk back into her place.

"Did you have a pleasant ride from Skeensboro', captain?" she asked, not at all impressed by the "style" upon which he so much prided himself.

"Yaas, oh, yaas; very pleasant, but I should have hurried myself if I had hoped to meet Miss Davidson."

"Did you say tea, father?" said Laura, ignoring the labored compliment. "Good-evening, Mr. Marks. I am afraid I can not say the same of *your* ride this morning, which Captain Skeene claims for his. Your ride came to an abrupt and rather ludicrous *finale*, if the stories I hear about town are true."

"Where did you hear them Laura? You have not been out?" said her father, almost angrily.

"No, but my friend, Lizzie Lyon, came in and told me all about it. It made me laugh in spite of the part you took in it, father."

"Same as ever, always the same," said Marks. "This daughter of yours has learned something of Yankee 'cuteness' of repartee."

"She should be careful and not listen to tales against her father. When did Lizzie Lyon come in?"

"Soon after you did, father. She has been sitting in my room for an hour."

Skeene looked searchingly at her from his one serviceable eye. Was it possible that the girls had seen his encounter with Ned Fairchild? If so, he would die of pure shame.

"You look as if you had taken a fall, Captain Skeene. Surely you have not been trying your horse over any of our fences?" she said, turning a wicked look upon him.

Skeene started violently; she *had* seen it then.

"I had an encounter with one of the natives, Miss Davidson."

"An Indian; where?"

"Not an Indian; a native."

"You must excuse me if I say that your meaning is obscure, Captain Skeene. When you speak of the natives am I to understand that you refer to the people of this section?"

“Yaas,” grinning vaguely.

“Ah ; then I am a native ?”

“She will be too much for you, if you talk to her, Skeene,” said Marks, laughing.

“You must not interrupt, Mr. Marks. The captain and I are engaged in a personal discussion. What sort of man was this native ? Was he a tall, savage-looking man, with a horrible scar across his face and blear eyes ?”

“Yaas ; I think so.”

“Then I didn’t see him, although I heard something from Lizzie of an officer and a handsome young fellow named Fairchild, who had a quarrel in the road, and one of them—”

“Laura !” cried Davidson, sternly ; “be careful.”

Laura pouted and poured out the tea, and the gallant captain was convinced that she had seen the encounter in which he had shown to so little advantage. The meal went on in silence for some time, Marks in vain attempting to draw Laura out, but she returned monosyllabic replies, and confined herself to the duties of the table.

One of the returned posse came in, after Laura left the table, and joined the three gentlemen, who remained in close consultation. Whatever they were discussing, they were evidently plotting mischief of which some one would feel the weight before many hours had passed away.

CHAPTER VI.

TRAPPED.

NED FAIRCHILD knew that it was not safe for him to be in the street too much, even in Bennington, in the present state of feeling of the New York men against him. But, several of his friends were at work, and by five o’clock in the afternoon he was pretty well satisfied that nothing more could be learned of the plans of his enemies at present, and he began to prepare for riding home, when Lizzie Lyon, the daughter of the blacksmith, came into the room where he was sitting.

They were old friends and school-mates, and Lizzie was affianced to his personal friend, John Maltbe.

"Ah, Lizzie," he said; "why have I not seen you before?"

"Father sent me out on your business," replied Lizzie, "and I have just come in."

"I would like to know some one he has *not* sent out," said Ned, laughing. "Where have you been?"

"I called at Mr. Davidson's, to see how matters went there."

"Did you, indeed? Then perhaps you can tell me who the lady is I saw at the window?"

"I thought you knew. That is Laura Davidson, the noblest girl in this colony, even if her father is a bad man."

"She is very handsome. I am ashamed to say that she saw my encounter with that Skeene, for it took place under her window."

"Oh, she told me all about it, and it pleased her immensely. Laura does not share her father's hatred of the 'Green-Mountain Boys.'"

"Then she is a noble girl, indeed, and I should be proud to know her. Why have I not seen her before?"

"She has been at school in New York, and has just finished her education. You should hear her play and sing! And then she is so quick and cunning in conversation, that it takes a ready tongue to match her; poor girl!"

"Why do you speak of her in that way, Lizzie?"

"Because she is destined to a fate which would be worse than death to me. She is promised in marriage to that old villain, Reuben Marks."

"You are jesting; you can not mean what you are saying, Lizzie."

"It is true, nevertheless."

"And will she permit herself to be sacrificed?"

"I do not know. At times I think that Marks has some secret power over her father, and she dare not resist. I would never consent to it, but who could counsel a daughter to resist her father's will?"

"It shall never be, if I have to drop that old mummy into Lake Champlain," cried Ned.

"Do you know that you created quite a sensation, Master Ned?" said Lizzie, archly. "She would talk of nothing except you while I was there, and it would do your heart good to hear her tell what a ridiculous figure Skeene cut when he rolled in the dirt."

"Could you find out nothing about their plans?"

"Very little; Marks is there, closeted with Skeene and Davidson, plotting mischief, but what form it is likely to take I do not know."

"I will match the scoundrels yet," said Ned, quietly. "Fear nothing for me. I have friends enough in Bennington to see that I suffer no wrong at their hands."

"I came up to tell you that supper is ready. When you go, I would like to have you carry a letter for me."

"'To John Mal'be, on Otter Creek—these with speed.' Is not that the way the superscription will run?" said Ned, laughing. "I will tell my friend Jack, at the same time, how fortunate he is in having secured the affections of the best and bravest girl in Bennington, and—"

She covered his mouth with her hand, playfully, and they went down to supper together, where the blacksmith and Tim Fawks awaited them.

"You had better wait until dark, Ned," said Lyon, as they took seats. "Tim has just come in and assures me that some one of those fellows who came back this morning can be seen watching every house where you are likely to be hidden. I hope you did not show yourself at the window."

"I am afraid I did, James," said Ned. "I went to open the window, and caught a glimpse of Ebenezer Welch at the corner, and I think he saw me."

"That is bad, for he is one of Davidson's men. Go out and see if he is anywhere in sight, Tim."

The young blacksmith went out, and returned immediately, to say that Welch was gone, but that another of Davidson's men was walking on the other side of the street, evidently watching the house.

"Then the scoundrel has seen you, Ned, and has gone to tell his master where you are to be found. We shall be forced to scout a little, but we will manage it, somehow."

The meal was eaten in silence for they were all thinking

of Fairchild's danger, and wondering if he would escape safely. Ned was by far the easiest of any man in the party, and joked Lizzie about her preoccupation, accusing her of being engaged in composing her letter to John Maltbe. When night came on he sent Tim to the tavern, with orders to get out his horse as quickly and secretly as possible, and go to a thick grove a quarter of a mile out of the village and wait for him there.

Soon after, the blacksmith and his young friend left the house, and walked swiftly out of the village toward the point where they were to meet Tim, and arriving there before him, sat down to wait. Ten minutes after, the young man came, and after a cordial farewell to his friends, and an injunction to be watchful and report all the movements of the New York party, he mounted and rode away.

Half a mile farther on the road ran through a thicket, where the bushes grew close on either hand. Ned was riding at a rapid trot along the path, when his horse stumbled, strove to extricate himself, and fell with his rider, who required the utmost address to prevent himself from being crushed in the fall.

As he sprung to his feet, half a dozen dark forms sprung from the bushes, and before he had time to use his weapons he was seized by strong hands. Exerting his great strength to the utmost, he had almost freed himself, when his arms were drawn back, a hickory stick thrust under them and confined in its place by two or three turns of a strong rope. In the darkness it was impossible to distinguish faces; but he felt that he was overmatched and in the hands of enemies, whoever they might be.

"Release me, you scoundrels," he said. "Is this the way to set upon a single man?"

"Gag him if he will not be quiet," said a voice that he did not know. "I advise you to be quiet, Mr. Fairchild, for you are overmatched."

"By what right do you take me?"

"We have law and warrant for our acts," replied the same voice, "which is more than you can say of your own the last week. No, no; keep back, or you will spoil all."

The last sentence was addressed to one of his companions,

who was advancing with uplifted hand. Before any one could interfere he struck the bound man a stunning blow in the face.

"Only a coward could strike that blow!" cried Fairchild, as he reeled backward. "I know you, fool and coward that you are."

"A muttered oath was the only reply, and some one seized the dastardly assailant and dragged him away.

"Gag him," said the man who appeared to be the leader. "He may make a row and bring help. We don't want these Bennington men on our tracks. They would make short work of us."

The order was obeyed, and Fairchild was rendered incapable of crying out if he had been so disposed. He saw that it was useless to resist, so when the men ordered him to advance he did so, firmly held upon each side by a strong hand. His horse was turned loose, and he could hear him trotting down the road toward Bennington.

Cursing his self-confidence in riding into the snare which had been set for him, the young man was led onward by rough and difficult paths, evidently with the design of misleading him as to the course they took. After a walk of nearly an hour the party paused for a moment, and he was raised from his feet and carried up a flight of steps, and through long passages. Then the course tended downward, and a current of cool air convinced him that he was either in a cellar, or some lower room, which was designed as his prison.

"Give me those manacles," said the leader. Heavy iron shackles were produced, and fastened tightly upon his lower limbs, and the chain attached to a ring in the wall. Then the rope was taken from his arms and handcuffs substituted in their places.

"You may go, men," said the leader, "and remember my warning. If a breath of this goes out to the world, it would be better for you all if you had never been born."

He heard the retiring footsteps of the men, but knew by the hurried breathing that some one yet stood beside him. A hand moved the gag from his mouth, and he breathed more freely. The bandage was also removed from his eyes, but

that did not help him, for the place was shrouded in the deepest gloom.

"You may cry out as much as you like, Mr. Fairchild," said his captor. "Not that it will help you in the least, but it may be a relief to your mind."

"Why am I brought here? I demand to be set at liberty or know the reason of my confinement."

"You should not be so inquisitive, my young friend. It is enough for you to know that you have managed to make yourself particularly obnoxious to a number of persons during the last week, and you are put in prison for a fixed purpose. In good time you shall know what that purpose is."

"This is the work of Reuben Marks," cried Fairchild.

"Guess again."

"It is idle; go, and leave me to myself."

"As you like. I leave you to the companionship of the rats until such a time as we may see fit to remove you. Of this you may be certain; your punishment has only begun."

"Release me and give me a weapon and I will fight the whole party."

"I do not fight with any one except a gentleman. One who is under the ban of law has no claims upon us."

"Cowards!"

A burst of mocking laughter succeeded, and he heard retreating steps. A door closed, a key turned, bolts shot into their sockets, and he was alone in the darkness. He felt about him with his chained hands, and satisfied himself that the space in which he was confined was barely eight feet wide and a little greater in length. The walls were of solid masonry, and the only air which filled the room came from narrow slits between the masonry and the beam which rested upon them overhead. These slits, as nearly as he could make out, were about four inches wide, but a current of pure air poured in and filled the room.

"I am in a trap," he muttered. "How will it end?"

He rose and paced impatiently up and down the narrow space, his mind in a tumult. Of course he suspected that he was in the power of Davidson or Marks, but he could not satisfy himself which it was. Neither did he know who had

struck him, for it might have been either of the two, or perhaps Skeene, in revenge for his tumble of that afternoon. But where had they taken him? This hiding-place was artfully contrived, and it was evident they had no fear that any outcry he could make would reach the outer air. He knew, too, that if he was taken to New York, the least he could expect was a long imprisonment for his attack upon the sheriff.

But it was useless for him to study upon it. The active will of the young mountainer came into play, and throwing himself upon the hard floor of the cell, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

GUESTS NOT INVITED.

WHEN Ned Fairchild's horse came racing into Bennington, half an hour after his departure, and drew up panting at the door of the tavern, all was confusion in the village. His friends at once understood that some terrible evil had befallen him, though what it was they could not tell. James Lyon and Tim Fawks at once ran to the various members of Allen's regiment resident in Bennington, and they turned out *en masse*, and something nearly approaching a riot was in progress, but was quelled by the quiet good sense of James Lyon.

"Nothing can be done in this way," he said. "We are wasting time in idle acts. Let us get to work and find out whether any of the enemies of Fairchild have left town.

"Here's one of em," cried Tim Fawks, pointing to Ebenezer Welch, who had joined the crowd in the street. "Tar and feather him."

"None of that!" cried the other, sternly. "The fact that he is here is in his favor. Let us find out who are absent."

The crowd separated into squads, and went from house to house, and satisfied themselves that not one of the *posse* which had suffered defeat at the hands of the Green Moun-

tain Boys had left the town. Even Reuben Hawks and Davidson came out and appeared to be hurt to think that their neighbors should suspect them of doing Fairchild any wrong, or injuring him in any way, without a warrant.

"It may be all right, Rube Marks," said the sturdy blacksmith. "God forgive me if I do you wrong, but I suspect you grievously."

"Of what?" snarled Marks. "Speak out, and tell me what you suspect me of doing?"

"I think that, some way or other, you know what has become of Ned Fairchild."

"I have not been out of Davidson's house since three o'clock. That I can prove by the servants."

"And Sam Davidson has been with you?"

"Every moment of the time. Question the servants, if you like, if you won't believe me."

Upon inquiry, it was found that he spoke the truth. Neither Davidson nor Marks had left the room in which they had eaten supper, but remained over their wine until called out by the tumult in the village.

"It's a queer thing," said Lyon, "and either Marks is too sharp for me, or I have done him a great wrong. Come along, boys; we can't do any thing here."

They left the house, and continued their inquiries, and at last were forced to the belief that nothing could be done until morning. A message was sent to warn Ethan Allen of the trouble, and ask him to come down, and most of the crowd retired to their houses. Davidson and Marks separated at their respective doors, looking one another in the face as they shook hands, with smiling faces.

"Our friend Lyon suspects me," cried Marks. "Strange, strange."

"I am afraid he suspects me too," laughed Davidson.

"It is a wicked, wicked world. We don't know who to suspect." And, shaking his head in a sorrowful manner, "Oh, the world, the world!"

"What a magnificent hypocrite you are, Reuben," said Davidson. "Good-night, and many pleasant dreams."

"And good-night to you," was the ready reply. "May you learn to value my friendship, as it deserves to be valued."

Good-night, my good, kind, considerate, but rather selfish friend; good-night."

And the pair of accomplished rascals parted, each cherishing the determination to outwit the other, if it could be done.

Next day, Ethan Allen came into Bennington, raging like a lion robbed of his mate. Of all the young men who followed him, there was none in whom he put greater trust than in young Fairchild. But, where was he? In what nook and corner had they hid the body, if, indeed, he was slain? The roads were hard, and the most experienced scouts could not make out in which direction the party went who carried Fairchild away. They found a place in the road toward Otter Creek where a quantity of loose brush had been thrown in the path, and signs of a struggle, and the fall of a heavy body, and among the broken branches they picked out a fragment of green cloth, and a button like those worn upon Fairchild's coat. But, at this spot, the trail ended. There were plenty of tracks leading out of Bennington, but none leading in, and the trail ended at the spot where the scuffle had taken place.

"The boy has been set on by a large party and overcome by numbers," said Allen. "Not a man of 'em all dare meet him face to face. Doubtless, we shall hear from him next in New York, if these rascals of Tryon's have got hold of him. Turn about and make for the village. We'll have hostages for his appearance, and good ones, too."

Reuben Marks gave a dinner at his house that afternoon, and none were invited except Davidson, Welch, and Skeene. They were in high spirits, and talked glibly of what they would do with the Green-Mountain Boys when their plans were perfected.

"I understand that Allen is in town to day, in search after Fairchild," said Davidson.

"I wish he would give us a chance at him," said Skeene, in a musing tone. "The fellow came into our place, one day, and you ought to have heard the insulting way in which he talked to my uncle."

Marks smiled grimly.

"I should have been pleased to see the meeting between

your uncle and Ethan Allen, both of whom are types of a class. As for Allen, we must have him."

"I don't think we dare touch him," said the sheriff, doubtfully. "The Bennington men would have our lives."

"I am not afraid of them. The secret of our failure before was that we went to work in the wrong way. Ethan Allen I will have—"

"Who talks of Ethan Allen?" cried a stern voice. "He is here to answer for himself."

The four men started to their feet in consternation, for there, blocking up the doorway, stood the towering form of Ethan Allen, while close behind him stood Seth Warner, Remember Baker, John Maltbe, and James Breckenridge—their faces dark, fixed and determined.

"How dare you come here?" shrieked Davidson. "By Heaven, I'll have you arrested, every man!"

"You had better be quiet," said Allen. "Bear in mind the horse-pond on Otter Creek. You are no safer in Bennington than you were when you came like a thief in the night to the house of James Breckenridge. I say, Marks, why don't you ask us in?"

"Come in, colonel," quavered Marks. "You and your friends are welcome. Sit down while I go out and order the servant to send in something warm."

"Don't go, Marks," said Allen, persuasively. "I've got something warm with me, and I'll make it hot for you if any of you try to leave the room. Don't look at that window, Welch. If you jump out you will land in the arms of my best men who will make short work with you. Come in, boys; let's test the old rascal's wine."

The others came in and seated themselves at the table in such a way that they could overlook the motions of their entertainers. Skeene sat with open mouth, staring in blank amazement at the insolent intruders.

"'Pon my word, Marks, why don't you order them out?"

"Order them out? See how quick they'll start, you small-souled specimen of humanity!" said Ethan, fiercely. "You open your mouth again, and I'll break you in two. Jack Maltbe, this is the same red-coat scrub who wanted Ned Fairchild to hold his horse."

"By Jove, I'm not going to sit here and be insulted," cried Skeene, rising. Maltbe reached out his disengaged hand, and dragged him back into his seat so quickly that his toes rose into the air and struck the under side of the table.

"Change your glasses round," cried Allen. "Every man has got to drink the toast I am about to propose. If he don't, I'll cram the glass down his throat, and my word is as good as my oath. Fill up, you little hop-of-my-thumb, or I'll make it warm for you."

Every one of the Green-Mountain Boys had laid a heavy handled riding-whip across his knees, and looked so bold and determined that their entertainers dared not refuse, and the glasses were filled all round.

"I protest against this breach of the peace," said Davidson.

"Breach of the peace? Nonsense. We have come in to have a good time, knowing that Marks gives a wine-party, and that he keeps a good vintage. Now for my toast. Here's confusion to all foreign and domestic tyrants; their small bottle-holders and emissaries; their writs, escheats and other cheats whatsoever they may be! Let every man drink or take the consequences."

Davidson and Marks just raised the glasses to their lips and set them down again. Welch did the toast full justice, but Skeene did not raise the glass at all.

"You don't drink," said Ethan, blandly, leaning across the table.

"I'll be hanged if I drink it," replied the captain, sullenly.

"You must drink it," answered Allen, promptly rising from his chair. "Help him down with it, Jack."

Maltbe caught up the glass and offered it to the irate military hero with such a look that Skeene quailed before it, and taking it from the hand of Maltbe raised it to his lips and was about to put it down untasted, when Breckenridge gave his elbow a jog and half the contents of the glass ran down his throat, while his person received the rest.

"You low, demned scoundrel! What do you mean by that?" hissed the official.

"Keep your tempers, boys. Don't let a little thing like

that ruffle you. Having done justice to my toast, we will proceed to business. Sam Davidson, where is Ned Fairchild?"

"I thought you would come to that, Ethan Allen. I know nothing about your rascally associate and care less."

"Just so. But we *do* care about him. Ned is a good comrade, though a trifle hasty at times in his dealings with such small reptiles as Marks and yourself, and we can't get on without him. He must be brought back."

"Then why don't you bring him back? I know nothing about him."

"Nor you, Marks?"

"Nothing whatever, as we proved to the satisfaction of James Lyons, who suspected us because our relations with Fairchild were not very friendly."

"We have thought the matter over since, friend Davidson. Will you be so kind as to step to the window with me?"

Davidson rose and accompanied him to the window, and was astonished to see nearly three hundred men of Allen's regiment under arms, and posted about the house. Cries of rage assailed him the moment his face appeared. "Bring out the old villain; hang him to the house gable; ride him on a rail out of Bennington," were among the wildest of the ejaculations which he heard on every side.

"The boys appear to be anxious to see you, friend Davidson," said Allen, quietly. Then, waving his hand to the crowd, enforcing silence, he drew him away from the window and again sat down at the table.

"Another glass of wine, gentlemen, and let us understand each other. We have come here to force from you a secret of the hiding-place of our young friend, Edward Fairchild. We know well that you and no others were the cause of his disappearance, and we insist upon it that you tell us where he has gone."

"Do you question my right to arrest a man on a warrant?" demanded the sheriff.

"Certainly not. It is your privilege as well as your duty, to do so."

"Very good. Then suppose I have caused the arrest of

Edward Fairchild? I make the supposition, not the admission. Suppose I have done this, what would you do?"

"That would have to be decided hereafter. I think I should know what to do," replied Allen. "I don't care a penny's worth whether you confess it or not, for I am certain that you are the cause of all this."

"Then you may go to the devil with my compliments," roared Davidson, "for if I knew ever so much of him, I would not tell you a word."

"That is your decision, sheriff?"

"Yes."

"And yours, Reuben Marks?"

"I have nothing to say, my dear colonel, not being in the witness-box."

"I will not ask the captain, who, saving his presence, is an ass."

"Sir!" roared Skeene; "those words demand explanation."

"Certainly; permit me to explain. When I say that you are an ass I do not mean that you resemble that long-eared and musical quadruped in personal qualities, except your ears, which are of asinine length. But I do mean that your magnificent intellect would suffer in comparison with that of the noble animal with which you might claim relationship."

"It is evidently your intention to provoke us to resent your insults," said Marks. "But, if my friends will take my advice, they will pay no attention to what we must regard as the pointless insults of a clodhopper."

Allen started to his feet, and for a moment seemed about to rush upon the speaker; but a look and muttered word from Seth Warner restrained him, and he remained quiet, looking at Marks.

"We have no further time to waste with you, gentlemen. You have refused to do us justice, and give up our friends, and you must bear the penalty. By my advice, my friends outside have restrained themselves until now; but, by Heaven! I will not answer for your lives if you persist in your refusal to do right. Go to the window Seth, and order up

two platoons of your company. We need as many as that."

"What are you about to do?" said Marks, turning pale.

"I can't say; but you may depend upon it that it will be something a little worse than your experience at the horse-pond, on the Otter."

"Wait," said Marks, as Warner stepped toward the window; "what do you demand?"

"That you tell us where Ned Fairchild is confined."

"Will you promise to disband your men and go: way if we give you our word of honor that you shall hear from your friend in three days' time?"

"We are not to be caught with such chaff as that, you old fox. Probably we should hear from him at Skeensboro', on his way to New York. It won't do."

"But if we promise that he shall be set at liberty?"

"Not even that. But we will agree to wait here until you can send one of your number to bring him here."

"Let us consult together for a moment."

Allen agreed to that, and the three drew together in a corner of the room, and conversed in low, eager tones. It seemed that Davidson, who was by far the bravest man of the party, strongly opposed any concession upon their part, and insisted upon a rigid enforcement of the law. But the others overruled him. Certain ominous sounds which arose from the street warned them that the mountaineers were getting impatient.

The captain showed the utmost terror, and the desire to yield to the demands of Allen, of whom he had a most wholesome dread. At last Marks separated himself from the others, and came forward.

"We agree, under protest, to your demands," said he, sullenly. "This young man has been arrested, under a warrant from the proper authorities, for assaulting a sheriff, in the discharge of his duties. We warn you that you are breaking the laws in attempting a rescue, and that you will be called to account for it at the proper time."

"All right, Reuben," cried the other, laughing "Who are you going to send out?"

"Mr. Welch will go. He knows the way," replied Marks.

Welch was about to leave the room, when there came a thundering roar from the street outside, which swelled and gathered, and the name of Ned Fairchild was borne upon the breeze. Allen and the others sprung to the window, and there, borne aloft upon the shoulders of a dozen stalwart men, waving his hand and laughing, was the man they sought, Edward Fairchild, escaped from durance vile

CHAPTER VIII.

NED'S FAIR RESCUER.

We left Ned sleeping upon the hard floor of the prison in which he had been confined, worn out by the toils of the day. From time to time a faint sound of muffled footsteps could be heard, coming from above, but he slept on, oblivious to all outside things. After a few hours he was awakened by the opening of a door above him, and a man, closely masked, came down, carrying a lighted lamp in one hand, and a server containing food and drink in the other.

"I have brought you food," he said; "and am instructed to leave the light with you, as it is not the intention of your captors to treat you with any degree of harshness. Here are food and drink."

"I can not eat with handcuffs on," said the young man, stretching out his heavily ironed hand.

The man produced a key, removed the handcuffs, and threw them on the floor, and stood near while Ned made a hearty meal.

"You take your imprisonment coolly," he said, amazed at the appetite which the mountain-man displayed.

"I have been taught to take all sorts of trouble in that way," was the reply. "When I am out of this difficulty, I will make some sport for the men who have done it."

"Will you? Then it is for our interest to keep you as

long as we can. When you are removed from this place, it will not be to return to Otter Creek."

"Whose house is this?"

"A gentleman's."

"Indeed; I mean where am I confined?"

"I do not think I violate confidence when I tell you that it is in a walled cellar."

"Yes; you are one of the non-committal sort, my friend. Was this done at the instigation of Marks and Davidson?"

"I will go to them and inquire," replied the other, with a loud laugh of derision. "Nonsense, man; do you think I am here to answer questions?"

"I suppose not, but if I were you I would not advertise myself as plainly as you have done," replied Ned.

"What do you mean?"

"That your taste in jewelry will be your ruin, friend Welch. That flashy ring of yours has been shining in my face ever since you came into the room. Ha! he! he!"

"Perdition!" hissed the masked man, looking at his hand upon which shone a large paste ring. "What a fool I am."

"One who seeks to disguise himself ought to be more careful, Ebenezer. Take some of the wine. It is capital, and the king himself does not drink better, I assure you."

Welch was so angry that the prisoner had detected him that he could not speak, and stood muttering and growling.

"When the jackal appears, the lion is not far off; when the pilot-fish shows himself, he leads the way for a greater than himself. You might as well have told me at once that Davidson was at the bottom of this."

"Have you finished your meal?" cried the other, savagely.

"Yes."

The fellow gathered up the dishes quickly, and left the place, and in his rage forgot to lock the handcuffs. Ned heard the key turn in the lock, and catching up the lamp, began to look at the manacles on his feet. They were old and rusty, for the captors had depended more on the security of the place than the fetters. Searching his pocket he found a small but finely-tempered knife, and began to work at the lock of the fetters until he managed to spring one of them back. The other was more obdurate, and he worked over it

nearly half an hour, when it suddenly sprung back, and he threw off his fetters and stood erect.

"Good, so far," he said. "Now for the next thing. At any rate, I have a weapon here."

He took up the heavy manacles and balanced them in his hands, calculating how great an amount of force would be necessary to lay a man out with this weighty weapon.

"Ah!" he thought, "if Marks and Davidson would only come now; I must wait, at any rate, for I can not force this lock."

He waited half an hour, when some one came hurriedly to the door of the part of the building above, opened it, and came quickly down. He sprung to his feet, and waited behind the door of his cell, with his heavy manacles griped in his right hand, ready for a blow. The steps did not approach the door, but, after reaching the level, appeared to pass by through a sort of corridor. There was a little wicket in the door of the cell, and, stealing cautiously to this, the prisoner looked out, and, to his utter surprise, saw the beautiful girl who had overlooked his encounter with Skeene passing down the alley, with a wine-basket in her hand. She opened a door at the end of the passage, and the young man could see that it was a wine-cellar which she entered; and then he shrunk back out of sight.

What should he do? This girl's face was beautiful, but she was not the less the daughter of Samuel Davidson, the sheriff. If he could speak to her, would not her duty to her father force her to report to him that the prisoner's hands and feet were free? Then he remembered Lizzie Lyon had said that Laura was not an enemy to the Green-Mountain Boys, and defended them to her father. He determined to trust her.

A moment after she came back, singing a gay song, carrying several claret bottles in the basket. When she came opposite the door, the young man rapped upon the wood and spoke to her.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Davidson. Here; behind this door!"

She recoiled a little and then came boldly forward.

"Who is there?" she cried.

"My name is Edward Fairchild, and I have been set upon by ruffians and confined in this place, for what reason I do not know."

She came nearer, and saw his face at the wicket, and started back.

"You are the young man who quarreled with Captain Skeene, in front of the house, yesterday morning?" she said. "Who has placed you here?"

"I am sorry to say it, but I fear that it is the man you have named, your father, and Reuben Marks."

"What have you done?"

"Nothing, except aiding the Green-Mountain Boys in their struggle for their rights."

"Are you of those who burned the writs the other day, and helped to drive my father from James Breckenridge's house?"

"She has heard of that, then," thought poor Ned. "I am gone, but I won't lie to save my life."

"Miss Davidson," he said, "I know how damaging the confession is, but I am the person who burned the writs. The rest only looked on, and held your father."

"I have heard of you before, Mr. Fairchild," she said, coming nearer to the wicket, "and I say to you, as I have said to my father, that you have done right, and no other colony has the right to oppress men who only seek their just dues."

"That is nobly said!" cried the young man. "Your friend, Lizzie Lyon has only done you justice. No matter what my fate may be, I will remember your words, to the last of my days."

She blushed and looked down a little before the ardent gaze of those young eyes, and then drew closer to the wicket.

"What can I do for you?"

"I wish to ask you some questions. What time of day is it?"

"About four in the afternoon."

"Of the month?"

"The fourteenth."

"I have been here since yesterday evening. What men have you in the house at present?"

"Only one or two servants. My father has gone to the office of Mr. Marks. I will not see injustice done to any man, but—"

"I hear some one moving up-stairs."

"Then close the wicket and go back to your place. I will not be long away."

She sprung quickly up the stairs with the wine-basket upon her arm, and appeared to have an altercation with some person above. He heard the door locked and knew that no one was coming down as yet, and waited patiently. An hour passed, two hours, and yet she did not come. As for hearing any outside sounds in his prison, he could not have been more closely barred from sight and sound in his grave. Had Laura deserted him? He believed in her truth, but thought that some unexpected accident kept her away. At last the door opened, and he heard light steps stealing down, and taking his place at the wicket, he saw her, followed by a huge black fellow with an ax.

"Break open this door, Peter," she said. "I have lost the key."

"The negro drew back his arm, and at the second blow the door was forced open, while Ned screened himself in a corner. When this was done she sent the man away without permitting him to enter the room, and after his footsteps had ceased to sound she called to Fairchild to come out.

"I have been detained," she said. "The streets are in great commotion, and hosts of your friends are in sight, swearing that they will have you out, if they have to march to New York to free you."

"Good for the Green-Mountain Boys! What is this place in which I am confined?"

"Do you not know?"

"I have not the slightest idea. Remember that I was brought here blindfolded, and at night."

"That is true. Then I have a favor to ask of you. Will you consent to leave this place blindfolded, as you came, or at least to keep your eyes closed until I tell you to open them?"

"I give you my word of honor not to look, so you need not blind my eyes."

"Thank you. I have a reason for this which I think you can understand, for you have doubtless long since decided who are likely to have taken you prisoner. My father, I grieve to say, has taken the side of the oppressor in this wicked quarrel, and conceives it his duty to work against the settlers. But he is wrong, and I am afraid willfully wrong, in this matter."

"I understand your motive, and if you will be my leader, I will agree to keep my eyes closed until you tell me to open them."

"Are you ready to go?" she said, softly.

"I think it better. Some of my enemies might come."

He closed his eyes tightly and she took his hand in her soft palm and led him toward the stairs. They began to ascend, reached the top, and passed through an alley, a long room, and then another passage, and he felt the cool air of the summer on his cheek. She took him by a circuitous course, through narrow paths, and caused him to make so many short turns as to baffle the most experienced scout. Then she stopped suddenly, whirled him about twice, and told him to open his eyes.

They were standing by the side of the Established Church, in one of the main streets of Bennington, though how he had reached it he could not say. She had led him so cunningly, and by such devious paths, that he was completely at fault, and he looked at her with a smile.

"I have set you free," she said. "Now tell me, upon your honor as a man, do you know where you have been confined?"

"I do not."

"Then you can not honestly point out any place in Bennington as the one where you were a prisoner. Doubtless you suspect, but if you do, for my sake keep it a secret."

"You may depend upon me," replied Ned. "I do not promise not to revenge myself upon those who have taken me, but I do say that their punishment shall be the lighter for what you have done."

"I must bid you good-by," she said, with drooping head. "It will not do for me to be seen in your company by my

father and his friends. You will find Ethan Allen and the rest at Marks' office."

She left him, and he hurried down the street and appeared unexpectedly in the space in front of Reuben Marks' office.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PUNISHMENT OF MARKS.

ALLEN and the rest greeted the appearance of their young friend with riotous cheers, and leaving the unlucky dinner-party to themselves, they sprung down into the street, and were seen shaking hands with Ned, who never knew before how much he was in demand among the mountaineers. But, when they demanded of him where he had been he told them frankly that he did not know.

"We've got to have some fun out of Rube Marks, for all that," roared Remember Baker. "He as good as confessed that he was the one who had you tied up."

"He deserves almost any thing you can do to him, boys," said Ned, "but, I don't know as it will pay us to trouble him now."

"Pah; don't be a fool, Ned. The boys must have some fun with him, or they'll spoil. They've brought the big catamount down from the mountain on purpose."

"I don't oppose you, lads," replied Ned, "only I would not hurt him."

"Hurt him? Who wants to hurt him? We only want to make him as ridiculous as we can. That comes the catamount now."

The catamount was the symbol of the Green-Mountain Boys. A dozen men appeared, bearing upon their shoulders a platform, upon which they carried a huge stuffed specimen of the mountain cat, with distended jaws and glistening eyes. The regiment cheered them as they proceeded, and set the platform down in front of the tavern, where the huge signboard swung between two posts, twenty-five feet high.

"Let's have Rube Marks out now—hurrah!" cried the men. "We'll teach the mean skunk a lesson. Bring him out—bring him out!"

Marks heard the loud calls in considerable dread, for he knew that the populace were excited against him, and he did not know what their object might be. Davidson, who was with him, laughed at his fears, though doubtful whether he would not be called upon to share the punishment of his friend. A number of the regiment entered the house, and though Marks made a feeble defense, they dragged him out into the open air, where the members of the committee, with Ethan Allen at their head, were ready to meet him.

"Mr. Reuben Marks," said Allen, "you are accused of a grave crime against the interests of the people. You have asserted, at various times, that this committee is an illegal and pernicious body, and that the members deserve to be hung."

To the surprise of Davidson, Marks replied boldly that all this was true.

"On your last visit to New York, you advised Governor Tryon to issue a proclamation offering rewards for the capture of the various members of this committee."

"Certainly I did. You are breaking the laws every day you live."

"You take every opportunity to cry down the claims of our people, and uphold the illegal grants of the New York Government."

"I do."

"That is enough. Keep him, my sons, and let the committee have a meeting to decide on his claims. It won't take us long."

The committee drew together, and after a short conference returned with the following ridiculous decision: The obnoxious Marks was to be placed in a chair upon the platform, securely tied, and hoisted up to the tops of the poles holding up the sign board, twenty-five feet from the ground, there to remain for two hours in the face of the assembled people.

"And," said Allen, in delivering the sentence, "I should dearly love to hoist up with him this visitor from Skeensboro', Captain Skeene, whose advent among us is uncalled for. And I would say that if, twenty-four hours hence, Captain Skeene

is to be found in Bennington, we will ride him out of the town on a rail."

"Do you really mean to carry out this infernal sentence, Ethan Allen?" said Davidson.

"I do."

"I forbid it, in the name of the law."

"You will join him on the platform if you do not look out, Sam Davidson. The boys are not in love with you."

Davidson slunk away, considerably crestfallen, and Marks was seated in a chair facing the catamount, whose distended jaws seemed to mock him. Pulleys had been adjusted at the tops of the poles, and at a given signal the men began to hoist away, and the platform, with its comical freight, was hoisted to the top, and the ropes made fast. A strong guard was stationed over the ropes, lest some of the Green-Mountain Boys should let the lawyer down by the run.

Davidson saw that any interference on his part would be likely to bring punishment upon his own head, and leaving his unlucky companion suspended in the air, he called to Skeene, and they left the house together, assailed by insults and almost assaults at every step.

"These scoundrels are in a state of complete rebellion, by Jove," said Skeene. "Do you think that infernal Allen would do what he said he would?"

"Do you mean in reference to the ride he proposed for you?"

"Yaas."

"He will do it, if you remain, most certainly. In my opinion, the quicker you get out of Bennington the better it will be for you."

"Oh, I don't want to stay," said Skeene, hurriedly. "But I say, how do you suppose that fellah got away?"

"How can I tell?" replied Davidson, in a gloomy tone. "It is just as well, for we should have been forced to let him go."

"I'll have him yet, by Jove," said Skeene. "He's a low coward."

At this moment they unexpectedly met Ned in the road, face to face.

"Captain Skeene," said he, "I have been waiting for you

to pay some attention to the affront which was put upon you by me."

"I don't want any thing to say to you, you low fellah," said Skeene, recoiling in terror.

"Oh; I have been expecting a challenge for some days but have not heard from you. I believe that you are one of those who captured me the other night, and that you were cowardly enough to strike me when my hands were bound. Acting upon that supposition, I return the compliment."

And he struck the officer a stunning slap in the face with his open palm.

"Having done so much in vindication of my honor, I wait your further pleasure, Captain Skeene."

The coward reeled back, covering his face with his hands, not daring to meet the bold gaze of the young mountaineer.

"I am afraid your young friend will not fight," said Ned. "If he should manage to screw his courage up to that point, let him know that a letter sent to me through Thomas Lyon, the blacksmith, will be sure to find me somewhere."

"I will attend to it," said Davidson; "although I shall advise him to pay no heed to the insults of one who is outlawed, with a price upon his head."

"Your age protects you, old man," said Ned, "as well as the fact that you are the father of one of the most noble girls in the whole world."

"What do you know of her?" hissed Davidson.

"I know that but for her, I might still have been walled up in the prison in which you placed me."

"Did Laura set you free? Speak quickly; put me out of suspense."

"Umph," said Ned; "perhaps I have said too much already, but for her sake I spare you, Sam Davidson. It was only on account of my urgent entreaties that you are spared the disgrace of roosting on the same platform with your fellow knave, Reuben Marks."

"I am not a fool. You never asked them to spare me."

"I did; not for your sake, but on account of your daughter, who loves you, wicked and cruel as you are. Go

your ways, and if you wish to send me any word, I will hear it through Tom Lyon."

Skeene had already disappeared and sneaked down to Davidson's house. The writer would not be misunderstood in what is said of this man's character. It is only at times that the influence of powerful friends is sufficient to keep a poltroon in command in a British regiment. As a rule they are as gallant men as can be found anywhere, but this Skeene was an exceptional case. Proud of his name, his position and his person, possessing a sneaking and cowardly disposition, it required all the influence of Colonel Skeene to keep him in command. He was completely cowed by the events which had occurred since his arrival in Bennington, and was eager to get back to Skeensboro' and safety. Davidson and Fairchild stood face to face alone.

"What have you to do with my daughter, young traitor?" said the older man.

"I know what you are plotting with yonder disgraced old man in front of the tavern, Sam Davidson, and I tell you it shall never be done while I have life."

"What business is it of yours?"

"I will make it my business. That beautiful girl shall not marry that shriveled heap of villainy, that jaundiced iniquity, Reuben Marks, if I can interpose to prevent it."

"The time will come when you shall repent your words, Fairchild. Now listen to me: before you spoke I had given but small encouragement to Reuben Marks. Now that you have chosen to interfere I will go into the business, heart and soul, and she shall marry him."

"She shall not," replied Ned, with a lofty gesture. "I, the outlaw, whom you despise, tell you no."

"Time will show. In a few days you will be a prisoner or hiding in the mountains from the wrath of the Governor and then I will show my power. If you ever return to Bennington you will see Laura the wedded wife of Reuben Marks."

"She shall be a widow immediately after my return, then," replied Ned. "Let us say no more now, but go home and coddle that unfortunate baby who has strayed out of Skeensboro' to this place. Advise him to return home at once, for

if I meet him in the streets again, I will kick him all the way to Skeensboro'."

Davidson hurried home, where he found Laura adding to the cressfallen expression of Captain Skeene by the exercise of her wit. The captain was helpless in her hands, begging her to spare him, but she was merciless.

"Skeene, will you be so kind as to leave us for a moment?" said the owner of the house; "I have something to say to my daughter."

The captain rose and hurried from the room, and father and daughter sat looking at each other with steadfast glances.

"Laura," he said at last, "have I been an unkind father to you all these years?"

"Unkind! You have been only too good to me," she answered.

"And yet, at the first opportunity, oh, that I should say it! you turn upon me and strike me to the heart."

"What have I done, father? I do not understand you."

"What do you know of this young ruffian whom I hate—Edward Fairchild?"

"Ah!"

"You understand me now. This man who has so abused me, who has treated me like a dog, who has beaten down my friends at the very threshold of my dwelling by his brutal strength, speaks of you as we speak of a saint. He has no words too lofty to express his admiration of you, my daughter. You, knowing that I hate him, set him free."

"I thought I did but my duty, father. If I understand it, beyond burning your papers, he offered you no indignity."

"If he did not, he hounded on his fellow-traitors to do it."

"I do not think so, father. If he struck Captain Skeene, he had sufficient provocation, for I saw the whole affair from my window. I can not think so hardly of the young man as you do."

He seized her by the wrist and dragged her to the window, from which the front of the Green-Mountain Tavern was in full view, and there, suspended between heaven and earth, fac-

ing the grinning catamount, hung Reuben Marks. It seemed to her that, even at this distance, she could see that a malicious grin distorted his sallow face.

"You see that dishonored man on yonder platform, his gray hairs made a mock by jeering boys and foolish women? That man, so disgraced and dishonored, is to be your husband, and your own act has forced it upon you. You are to marry Reuben Marks next week."

"Father, you can not hate me so much as to doom me to be the wife of that base man."

"You have brought it on yourself. I have read something in your conduct to-day, and in the eyes of Ned Fairchild, which has taught me a lesson. It would require but little to make you love this man, whom I hate, and he is taken by your beautiful face, and by your disobedience and ingratitude to me."

"I may never see him again," she faltered.

"You shall not, if I have my will. When you are married to Reuben Marks, we shall go to New York, where we shall be among friends, and woe to him if he ever dares to set his foot in that colony—an outlaw, with a price upon his head. Do you see that?"

He held up before her a rudely-printed bill, which contained the proclamation of Governor Tryon against the leaders of the Green-Mountain Boys. It set forth the crime of the men named in glowing words, and offered what was in those days a very large reward for the apprehension of the eight men named, and prominent among them she read the names of Ethan Allen and Edward Fairchild.

"I will never cease in my endeavors to hunt down this guilty man and bring him to justice, Laura. You, by your ingratitude, have nearly driven me mad, and I can not live in peace while he treads the earth."

"If I promise to marry Reuben Marks, will you cease to persecute him?"

"Would you promise on those terms?" he demanded, eagerly.

"I could almost bring myself to do it, but think what you are doing. Look at Reuben Marks, and then at me. Is he a man whom you consider worthy to be my husband? Is he

one to make a woman happy, or miserable? A miserly, mean, pettifogging wretch, with the heart of a deceiver. A man who has stained his soul with despicable crimes and who is hated and feared by those in his power, and detested by those who are not."

"Have you done? I repeat that you are insulting a man whom you are to marry."

"Then let it be so, but I promise you that I shall lead him an unquiet life."

Her eyes took on a strange glitter, and her father looked at her in dismay.

"How much longer is *my husband* to remain perched upon that platform?"

"The time is nearly completed," replied Davidson. "When it is over, he shall come here, and you shall give him your promise to become his wife. Will you do so?"

"I must see him first. Bring him here when his well-deserved punishment is over. Have I permission to retire to my room? I am hardly in a condition to endure the twaddle of this Captain Skeene."

"Do you hate me, my daughter?" he cried, in a passionate tone. "Wait. Is this marriage so utterly distasteful to you?"

"I would sooner die than be his wife," she said slowly. "Perhaps, after all, I shall choose that alternative."

"Curse him; curse all men!" said the unhappy Davidson. "He comes between me and the only being I love in the wide world. Listen to me, my child. Since you will have it so, refuse to marry him, but I must bear the burden."

"What do you mean?"

"I am in his power, utterly so, and if he lifts a finger, I am doomed; but, let it be so. Sooner a dishonored grave than the loss of your love."

The one good feeling in the heart of this man was awakened, his love for his only child, the remembrance of one who had loved and who had long ago gone to her grave. He could not have chosen a better course to win her than this, but to his credit be it said, nothing was further from his thoughts.

"You say that it is in my power to save you, to do you

good, dear father? Now you have given me a chance and you shall see that your Laura knows how to make a sacrifice. Are you really and truly in this man's power?"

"Completely."

"And does he insist upon it that I shall be his wife?"

"He will listen to nothing else. I have begged him, almost on my knees, to spare you, to leave you free, but he only laughed at me. But you shall not do it, Laura. I—I can die, I hope, like a man."

And for a moment the man was ready to sacrifice himself for her sake. Perhaps it was not a lasting feeling, but it was not the less a pure one for the moment. Laura felt it, and her noble heart would not permit another to sacrifice himself for her sake, and that one her father.

"Say no more," she said. "I will marry this man, if he insists upon it, but I make no promises to love or honor him. I can not do that."

He folded her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"My noble girl! My brave, devoted, true child. Your sacrifice shall not go unrewarded, for I promise you if Reuben Marks dares, in the after days, to wrong you, even to speak unkindly to you, I will kill him with my own hand."

"Father, my life seems ended. I have had my day, and now farewell to peace forevermore. What is that shouting?"

"They have taken him down," replied Davidson, looking from the window, "and are carrying him through the streets."

"Let me look at him," she said, bitterly, stepping to the window. The Green-Mountain Boys, in riotous procession, were carrying the platform through the village, on which sat Reuben Marks, yet bound to the chair, his sallow face wreathed into diabolical smiles. As he passed the house of Davidson he looked up, and his eyes met those of Laura with such a fiendish glance that her heart sunk within her.

"It is too horrible," she gasped, sinking back, almost fainting. "That man is hardly human, for he seems to exult in his disgrace."

"Some of them will dearly rue it," said Davidson, who was watching the proceedings with a moody brow. "I wish

they would kill him, and I would not follow his murderers too closely. 'They are letting him go.'

The platform was lowered, the cords were removed from the limbs of the notary, and he was set free. He cast one sweeping glance over the crowd, a look so baleful that many shrank before him, and then strode forward to the spot where Ned Fairchild stood.

"You have had your will with me," he said, raising his finger. "Are you satisfied?"

"It is not my work especially, Reuben Marks," replied Ned.

"No? You are the cause of it all, and I only say, remember."

He turned upon his heel, and the door of Davidson's house closed upon him. Ned looked after him a moment, and then at the window where Laura yet stood, and the expression of horror in her eyes struck a chill to his heart. How would it end?

CHAPTER X.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE GARDEN.

CAPTAIN SKEENE had a conference with Davidson and Marks, and then left the town, riding rapidly in the direction of Skeenesboro'. There was an expression of elation in his face which had not been there since the unexpected guests had come to dinner that day. The crowd jeered him as he rode out of town, for they knew that he was taking advantage of the twenty-four hours' grace granted him by Ethan Allen to get out of Bennington in safety.

For two days the sheriff kept quiet. He made no attempts to serve his writs, but there was much coming and going among the members of his faction, though for what purpose no one knew. Laura had one interview with her intended husband soon after Skeene left the house. He received her with an affectation of extreme politeness, taking her hand and pressing it to his withered lips.

"Your father has made you acquainted with my high presumption, Miss Laura?" he said.

"He has."

"Doubtless you regard it as such, too."

"I have no thoughts with regard to the matter. He told me that it was necessary to his safety that I should sacrifice myself, and I am ready to do so."

"He! he! he! You regard it as a sacrifice. To be sure; yes. Well, it is so, no doubt; but you are so cutting—so severe."

"I do not care to waste words on the subject, Mr. Marks. I have consented, for my father's sake, to be your wife; but I do not intend that you shall enter into this marriage without knowing that I have no love for you, and never expect to have."

"Just so; how good."

"On the contrary, I hate you, and shall do so to the end of life."

His sallow face lighted up with an expression of extreme joy, and he rubbed his shriveled hands together in the happiest manner.

"How good of you to warn me. My dear girl, I never expected you to love me, and—a word in your ear—I hate you quite as fondly as you hate me. He! he! he!"

She looked at him in the greatest amazement.

"With such feelings as those, how dare you ask me to marry you?"

"For revenge. You have always leveled the shafts of your wit at me, laughed me to scorn, showed me that you despised me, and I have determined to tame your proud spirit to the dust. I could not think of any better way to do it than this."

"Suppose I refuse, even now, to marry you?"

"Then I will most surely hang your dear father. Indeed, if I thought it would punish you half so much as a lifelong connection with one you hate, I would do it now. But you would get over your father's death, after a time, and be comparatively happy. With me, you never can be."

The ferocious glee with which he uttered this sentiment passes all description, and Laura turned deadly pale, but recovered her presence of mind immediately.

"I shall not retract my promise," she said. "I think I can make your life nearly as unhappy as you can make mine."

"Upon my honor—"

"Ah; and what a fine thing that is, to be sure," she said, laughing.

"I repeat—upon my honor—"

"And I say, capital! Your honor—*yours*! Say no more, Mr. Marks, for you will never make a better joke than that."

For a moment he was disconcerted, and his eyes fairly blazed with rage.

"I must begin practice early, and give you a foretaste of the joys to come, Mr. Marks. I assure you that I shall make your life a burden to you."

"I believe you would," he gasped. "Your impudence passes all belief."

"I intend to make your money useful when we are married," she continued. "Of course we go to New York, where money can be spent readily."

"By heaven—"

"Speak of something with which you are likely to become acquainted, Mr. Marks."

"If you interrupt me again, it will be the worse for you," hissed Marks, raving about the room. "You shall pay—you shall pay—you shall pay for this."

"I don't intend to pay for any thing, Mr. Marks. I shall leave that pleasing office to you. That is, you shall furnish the money and I will spend it. I hope you have plenty, for I shall need a great deal."

"You shall not have a penny."

"Then I will run you into debt. What capital fun I shall make for you."

"Go to the devil!" he roared, plunging out of the room. "Davidson, come here. If you don't want me to strike this girl, take her out of my sight."

Laura shot past them with a beaming look, and gained her own room, and Marks stood panting for breath.

"What is the matter?"

"Matter? She'll drive me mad."

"Does she refuse to marry you?"

"Not she. That's the devil of it. She commenced by telling me that she hated me cordially, but would marry me, and then—oh, that I should hear such language."

"Keep cool, Marks. Who ever thought to see you acting in this manner?"

"She says she will run me in debt if I don't give her all the money she wants."

"I expect to have that done. She shall not marry you without proper settlements, sir."

"Of course not; I don't ask it; but the way she said it—oh, she is the devil!"

"You don't expect a girl like that to be enraptured at the thought of marrying you?"

"She said she would make my life a burden to me, and I believe she will."

"I think it very likely. Pshaw, man, take the good the gods provide you, and say no more about it. Fight your way through it, and muster up your courage, for you need it all. You have never known what it is to encounter a woman of spirit, and my daughter is all that."

"I'll tame her."

"If you insult her, you are no better than a dead man, Marks, for, as surely as there is a God above us, I will kill you."

"I believe you would," muttered the man, hoarsely "How much do you think I can endure from her?"

"I warned you to let her alone."

"Yes, and let her marry that cursed Ned Fairchild. She'd do it, I tell you, and my main reason for pressing the marriage now is to get even with him. Do you know that he is prowling about the house now?"

"I have seen him, curse him," said Davidson.

"Then why don't you do something?"

"Because I promised her to let him alone if she would marry you."

"I did not promise any such thing."

"No; you can do what you like."

"I'll have him in New York in a week."

"Don't tell me any thing about it until the work is done. I must be blameless in the matter."

"All right. You would bungle it somehow, so you had better leave it with me. I hate him better than you do, but it will not grieve you when he bites the dust. Be that as it may, I do not choose to have him for a rival."

"You are right, there," said Davidson. "Ah, there is that daughter of Lyon's. I have a mind to forbid her the house, because I believe that she makes mischief here."

Lizzie Lyon passed through the hall, nodding carelessly to the two men, and went up to Laura's room at once. She was admitted, and for an hour the two girls remained in close conference. At the end of that time Lizzie came out, looking very sad, and casting a vicious look in the direction of Marks, who returned it by a bland smile.

"She has told you how she loves me, and what a happy man I am to be," he exclaimed. "I knew it; I can see it in your face."

"Ugh! you old toad," was the somewhat violent reply; "how I hate you."

He smiled again, and she passed out, followed by Marks, as far as the door, rubbing his hands, and exclaiming loudly against her allowing herself to hurry away. But scarcely was the door closed when Marks called to a sharp-witted negro lad who did his errands, and ordered him to follow Lizzie, see where she went, and who she talked with, and return with his report. The boy obeyed, and went sauntering down the narrow street, keeping Lizzie in sight, without giving her cause to think herself watched. She left the village and walked down by the river side, where she was met by Ned Fairchild.

"My dear girl—have you seen her?" he cried.

"Yes, Ned, and she has told me something which made my heart bleed for her. She has this day promised to be the wife of that spotted-snake, old Reuben Marks."

"She has not! It can not be!"

"It is true. She tells me that she hates him, that she would sooner die than be his wife; but, for all that, she has no choice. I am afraid there is no hope for you, my poor Ned."

"Did you offer her my service, and tell her that I stood ready, if need be, to die in her defense?"

"I told her all you said, and she thanked you sweetly, and said that the remembrance she had a friend so devoted would be dear to her in the life of sorrow which she must bear. But she added that you could do nothing for her, as her fate was fixed, and any attempt to interfere would only precipitate the marriage."

"I can at least kill that old rascal," said Ned, clasping his rifle more firmly. "I could almost bring myself to do it, when I think of the sorrow which it would save her."

"Do nothing violent, nothing rash, Ned. I can see that you love her, and I do not wonder at it. She is a noble girl, worthy of the love of any man, no matter who he may be. But, I have tried every way to induce her to see you, but she will not."

"Does she ever walk in the evening?"

"In her own garden, generally, but you dare not go there to see her."

"Dare I not? We will see about that," cried Ned. "What any man dare do for a woman I will do for her."

"I would not go near the house, if I were you."

"I will, I must. They dare not do me any harm after what has happened in Bennington to-day. The boys would hang them, I believe. Go back, my dear Lizzie, and take my thanks for what you have done. I will see her myself."

That evening, as usual, Laura walked in her garden, while the "gentlemen" were sitting over their wine. There were four of them in the room, with the prospect of sitting late, and she was glad to steal out of the house, and from the presence of Marks. She had walked about the garden once or twice when a tall form cleared the palings at a bound, and Ned Fairchild stood before her.

"You here!" she cried, recoiling.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "I felt that I must come to you. I have seen Lizzie, and what she has told me has driven me nearly mad, for I love you; I have no right to say it, but I love you."

"Hush!" she said, softly. "You do not know what you are saying. Under any other circumstances, I should be very

angry with you ; but, as it is, I have no heart to reprove you. Why do you come here, where you have so many enemies ?”

“ Are *you* my enemy ?” he said.

“ You ought to know best. Yes, say that I am, and go away at once, for I would not have you see him now.”

“ You mean that old villain, Reuben Marks. Lizzie must have been mistaken. Knowing the man as you do, it is impossible that you have promised to be his wife.”

“ It is true. I am to marry him, and if you are a man of honor, as I believe you to be, go away at once, and do not add to my sorrow.”

“ I know that I am mad,” he replied, passing his hand across his forehead, “ but I can not help it. The thought that you are to be the victim of such a man, is more than I can bear. Do you love him ?”

“ I ! I hate him ; oh, *how* I hate him !”

“ You hate him, and yet you marry him ?”

“ I hate him worse than any living thing, worse than I thought it possible I ever could hate. I can not explain—I do not know his power, but I dare not defy it.”

“ Let me do it for you. I will go into the house and drag him out.”

“ No, no ; you must not,” she cried, seizing him by the arm. “ I pray you, if, as you say, you really care for me, to go away at once.”

“ I can not do it.”

“ Would you destroy me as well as yourself, madman ? Then go on, and do your will, but if you do not pause you shall never see my face again.”

“ Pardon me,” he said, his voice almost dropping to a whisper. “ I am wrong but I am not master of myself. If this bar had not arisen—if you had met me under other circumstances, do you think you could have loved me ?”

“ How can I tell what *might* have been ? Lizzie has told me that you are a bold, true-hearted man, and I know that you have done nobly in defense of the rights of this people. I honor you for it ; I set you at liberty, for that reason. Do not make me repent it.”

“ I hope never to do that, but I do not give you up. My

love is of quick growth, but it is not the less strong, and I have never loved a woman before in my life. I will win you ; I will triumph over Reuben Marks and you shall reward me. Will you give me your hand at parting ?”

“There,” she said, extending her hand with a royal gesture ; “and before you go let me thank you for your love, though I can never reward it, except by my prayers for your well being through all my life. Leave me, seek some happier woman, such a one as Lizzie Lyon, and forget that such a being as poor Laura Davidson lives.”

“Forget you ! Not while life remains.”

He raised her hands to his lips and kissed them again and again, and she did not hinder him. Indeed, she had not the power.”

“Go !” she said, faintly. “And oh, my friend, in the days to come remember me and my unhappy fate.”

He turned to go, and as he went cast one lingering look upon her. At this moment a demoniac face was thrust forward, and a voice, sharpened by rage, cried shrilly :

“Thief ; outlaw ; take that !”

A pistol cracked twice, and they saw Ned Fairchild stagger, and the assassin uttered a cry of triumph. But, his elation was short lived. Ned made a tiger-like bound, lifted the puny wretch in his strong arms, and flung him bodily through a window in the rear of the house, carrying sash and glass with him. ...

“I am not hurt, Miss Laura,” cried Ned. “Farewell for the present. You shall hear from me again.”

And waving her a farewell, he leaped the palings and disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VILLAIN'S GAME.

Two days after the involuntary flight of Reuben Marks through the window of Davidson's house, a boat might have been seen floating upon the clear water of Champlain, skirting the lake's shore. It contained three men—Reuben Marks, his face scarred by contact with the glass and splinters which had rasped it upon that unlucky evening; Ebenezer Welch, and another man, who pulled a pair of oars, while Marks steered. They headed for a green point about five miles up the lake, pulling swiftly over the tranquil water. The boat at last grounded on the strand, in a shaded cove, and they dragged her up high and dry.

"Give the signal, Welch," said Marks, stepping up the bank.

Ebenezer raised his hand to his mouth and emitted a long, clear signal whistle, which echoed and re-echoed through the shady depths of the forest. It was quickly answered, and Captain Skeene, accompanied by another man in the uniform of a British ensign, came out of the woods not far away.

"I am glad you are on time, captain," said Marks. "Is every thing prepared?"

"All ready," replied Skeene. "Do you think they will come?"

"They dare not do otherwise after the pointed manner in which the challenge was given," said Marks. "I only hope that Ethan Allen will come with him."

"That Allen is a tough customer," said Skeene, doubtfully.

"He is rather a tough colt to manage," replied the other, coolly. "But, I think we can get on with him, somehow. How long have we to wait?"

"They ought to be here in an hour."

"Then there is nothing for it but patience on our part. The time will soon pass."

While they are waiting, let us return to Ned Fairchild. After he left Davidson's garden, he returned to Lyon's, where he kept quiet until it was quite dark. Just as he was about to quit the house the negro errand-boy of Marks came to him with a note, requesting an answer. He opened it, and to his surprise found that it came from Captain Skeene, and ran as follows :

"SIR :—Your repeated insults to me can only be answered in one way, and I demand the satisfaction due me, waiving my rank for my honor's sake. You will be so kind as to send a friend to Mr. Reuben Marks, who will arrange as to time and place. My only wish in regard to the matter is that it may come off as quickly as possible. The choice of weapons is yours.

"I remain,
"Your obed't Servant,
"ARCHIBALD SKEENE, Capt. 42d Reg't."

"Ha," muttered Ned. "The fellow has some spirit after all. Very well; he shall not be balked, if he is really desirous of a meeting."

He went out, and after some search, found Ethan Allen, whom he sent to meet Marks to arrange the preliminaries. Marks would have preferred any other man, but received the colonel courteously.

"No apology will suffice, I suppose," he said. "At least, my principal will not make any."

"Nothing will do except a meeting, as Captain Skeene has been insulted in the grossest manner, and insists upon exchanging shots."

"Oh, if he hankers after a fight, he can get it," said Allen. "Now as to place?"

"Upon Long Point, five miles above."

"A good place. The weapons will be pistols, and the distance, as your man is so hot, fifteen paces. When shall it come off?"

"In two days, at ten o'clock in the morning. No one need be present except the principals, ourselves and a physician, for your man will assuredly be hurt. The captain is a dead shot."

"I have no doubt he is a determined fellow," said Allen, laughing. "As to a doctor, I can attend to any wounds he

will make, and Ned has promised not to hurt the fool much. Give you good-day."

And the sturdy frontiersman strode out, leaving Marks to himself. A malicious grin passed over the sallow features as the door closed upon the colonel, and he called out for the boy.

"Get out Black Diamond and ride like the devil to Ranger's Point, where you will meet a man to whom you will give this message: 'All right; be on time. Ten o'clock Friday morning.'"

The boy hurried out, and a few moments after was seen dashing through the streets of Bennington at break-neck speed. He came next morning and had an interview with his master, who gave him some money and sent him away.

The next day Marks called upon Laura, who received him very much as she had once before, driving him nearly mad by loud and continual praises of Ned Fairchild. He had never seen such a woman, and could not understand how she had the hardihood to brave him in this audacious manner. Secretly, Davidson was pleased at the line of conduct taken by his daughter, although he affected to reprove her.

"You must promise never to see this young ruffian again," panted Marks.

"But, my dear sir," pleaded Laura, "he is such a fine young man, and makes love in the most irresistible way."

"You will drive me mad. Oh, how did I miss him that night?"

"I know," said Laura. "You did not hold the pistol straight. But then, how could you expect it? Think of your age."

"You will go too far yet, I warn you," hissed Marks. "Has that scoundrel been here again?"

"I don't know which one you refer to. I have not seen *you* since yesterday, and then you left me in the most abrupt manner, turning your back upon me. How impolite!"

This delicate reference to his flight through the window was not soothing to the feelings of Marks, and another stormy scene ensued. When she had worked him up to fever-heat, she left him, and went up to her room, and shortly after the boy who did errands for Marks came in and closed the door carefully.

"Ben," said Laura, "do you like money very much?"

"Iss, Missee Laura; like him too much."

"Does Marks send you on a great many errands?"

"Guess he do. Run here, run dere, all 'e time. He no pay too much, neider."

"What did you do for him yesterday, Ben?"

"Eh?" said the boy, with a vacant look. "Do good deal, all 'e time."

Laura took out a guinea and held it between her finger and thumb, and the eyes of the negro glistened with cupidity.

"Ha, dat hansum. What you want to know, Missee?"

"Let us make an agreement, Ben. You are to do everything Master Marks tells you, but you are always to tell me about it as soon as you can. He will pay you for it, but I will give you twice as much to tell *me*."

"Dat good; I do it, fast enuff."

"Now tell me all about yesterday, and I will give you *this*."

"Marse Allen he come from Tom Lyon's and come to Marse Rube. Dey talk good deal, and I listen at 'e door. Seem dat dis yer ornary coward ob a Britisher he want to fight wid Marse Ned. Hi! enty he fool, all 'e time. Marse Ned he lick 'im wid bof 'e han's tied behind 'im. So dey gwine to fight a jewel."

"A duel?" cried Laura, in alarm, starting to her feet.

"Dat's it—a jewel. Dey gwine down to Long Point Friday mornin', an' hab dey fight wid pistils. Hi—won't I be dar!"

"Are you sure that this is not a mistake, Ben? Perhaps you did not hear it plainly."

"Oh, yah; I hear 'em all right. Den Marse Rube he say, take Black Diamond an' ride to Ranger's Point like de debble, an' meet man dar. I went, and dar I find Cap'n Skeene and ten red-coats campin' by de lake, and tell de cap'n to be on hand Friday mornin'. He look a little skeered, an' he say he be dar, an' gib' me one litty penny. He no gemman, dat chicken ain't!"

"You have told the truth, Ben? You know where you will go if you tell lies?"

"Yah; guess I do. Dem preacher tell all 'bout 'em. I no

lie to you or Marse Ned. Tell litty lie to Marse Rube, some days."

"I believe you, Ben. There is the money, but you must be careful not to let your master see it. You had better go to Long Point on Friday, and watch, and tell me all about it."

"Bet I go, 'cause I want to see Marse Ned lick dat Britisher. He do it, mighty easy, so don't you be 'fraid for he."

Laura, on the watch, Friday morning, saw Marks and his two boatmen steal away at early dawn on their errand of death. She had tried to see Ned, in the mean time; but was too closely watched by Marks, and Lizzie did not come to see her. There was something in this duel which she did not like. From what she had seen of Captain Skeene, it surprised her that he should be the one to send a challenge to a man of Fairchild's known courage.

Why was he lurking about on the shores of Lake Champlain, accompanied by so many soldiers? She knew Marks to be treacherous to the last degree, and that he would rejoice in the death of Fairchild. The noble girl began to confess to herself that the manly conduct of the young mountaineer had made a deeper impression upon her than she would have cared to acknowledge to him, and she thought of him, night and day, making a painful contrast between him and the base man who was to be her husband. She waited in fear and trembling for the news which Ben would bring her before the day was done.

The hour had not yet passed when Ethan Allen and Ned Fairchild rode up to the spot where their antagonists waited, dismounted, and tethered their horses to the swinging boughs.

"I hope we have not kept you waiting, gentlemen," said Ethan, coming forward. "But, the truth is, these accursed writs which are flying about in this country, just now, give me a great deal of extra work. The boys have tarred and feathered a sub-sheriff in Boylston, this morning, and he has gone to Skeensboro' in a suit which will keep him warm for some days to come. We are ready for business, however."

"So are we," said Marks, coming forward. "This way,

colonel; I am instructed by my principal to say that if your man will make a formal apology—”

“That will do. Apologies are not in our line, Mr. Marks. We are here for fighting, not for words, and if your man means to back out, tell us so at once, and let us go about our business.”

“We don’t intend to back out,” replied Marks, civilly. “Have you a penny? toss for choice of position, and the word.”

Marks won the choice, and the men were placed opposite each other. Ned eyed his antagonist coolly, and evidently had not the slightest dread of what he could do. On the contrary, the lips of Skeene were trembling and pallid, and the hand which grasped the pistol trembled so that he could hardly hold the weapon.

“Don’t be a fool,” whispered Marks, clutching him by the shoulder. “You know that you are perfectly safe.”

“But sup—suppose they should make a mistake,” pleaded the coward. “They say he is a dead shot—and I don’t like it.”

“You disgrace the uniform you wear,” hissed Marks. “If you do not stand up like a man, I will let him shoot you, by Jove.”

“Get all ready; don’t make a mistake.”

“I am to count three,” said Marks. “Aim low, and if you hit him, so much the better. If you fire a second or so *before* the word, your chances will be better.”

“Are you ready there?” cried Allen, impatiently. “I am not going to wait while you finish a new backbone for that fellow.”

“You hear that, Skeene,” cried Marks. “Take your place.”

Skeene walked with faltering steps to the designated place, and Marks stepped forward, and commenced his count. Barely had the first word escaped his lips, when the weapon of Skeene exploded, and the bullet sung in close proximity to the head of Allen, who was fifteen or twenty paces to the left. The stalwart woodman made half a dozen tremendous strides, and grasping the trembling coward by the shoulders raised him from the earth, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Oh, oh! murder! Help! What are you trying to do?"

"You coward; you disgrace to the name of man! I'll shake your heart out."

"I couldn't help it," gasped Skeene. "It *would* go off!"

"Enough of this," said Ned, advancing. "Are we to go on with this farce or not, Ethan?"

"You've got to have a shot at him, anyhow," replied Ethan, dropping the son of Mars to the earth, "and if you don't wing him, you are no friend of mine. Load his pistol again, Marks."

The lawyer came forward, snatched the pistol from the hand of the captain, and began to load it. But, he worked slowly, glancing from side to side, when he suddenly wheeled and uttered a shout. At the word, ten men leaped up from their cover in the bushes, and rushed at the two lonely woodmen, with leveled weapons.'

"Surrender!" cried Marks; "you are taken."

"Treachery!" roared Allen. "Take that!"

Under the force of that tremendous arm the villain was sent reeling to the earth, and the two men wheeled to meet their assailants. But what could they do? A circle of glittering bayonets hemmed them in, held by men who were brave soldiers, not cowardly fools. But, Ethan Allen was not the man to yield easily. His strong hand fell upon the shoulder of Skeene, and dragged him to his feet, and the coward felt the cold muzzle of Ned Fairchild's pistol pressed against his temple.

"Halt there!" cried Allen. "You are not in New York, but upon the free shores of Lake Champlain. What do you want?"

The sergeant who led the party spoke. "You two are our prisoners, by the proclamation of Governor Tryon. Yield, and expect good treatment."

"Stand back, unless you would kill your captain!" cried Allen, "for as sure as you attempt to lay a hand on either of us, your captain is a dead man."

"Be careful, sergeant!" pleaded Skeene. "They are desperate fellows."

"You would not murder him?" gasped the sergeant.

At this moment, a long, lean hand was outstretched, and

the pistol was snatched from Ned Fairchild's hand. Marks had stolen up, unnoticed, and performed the feat. In an instant the soldiers threw themselves upon the Green-Mountain Boys, and a desperate struggle began. With these fearful odds against them, they would not yield, but strove with iron muscles to break through the line of their enemies and escape. Ethan Allen stood like a tower, four men clinging to him, and then the whole fell together in one struggling mass, and from among them a single man leaped up and plunged into the woods. It was Allen, escaped from the hands of his foes, but alone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAWYER'S COUP.

LITTLE BEN came into Bennington on a run, and hurried at once to Davidson's house. Laura had been waiting for him all day, and he went to her room at once. Hidden in the underbrush, the boy had seen the whole affair, from the arrival of Marks to the struggle for life or liberty. When Ned went down, overwhelmed by numbers, and Allen broke through the ranks of his enemies and made his escape, the boy had started out upon the return as fast as he could put foot to the ground.

He told the story in glowing words, enlarging, with all the negro's volubility, upon the manly resistance of the two mountaineers, and the treachery of Marks and Skeene. He gesticulated, rolled his eyes wildly, and in various ways manifested his abhorrence of the act of the friends of Skeene. Laura listened like one turned to stone, and there came into her beautiful eyes a steadfast purpose, which nothing could move.

"I am going to do something for Edward," she murmured. "Yes, I will free him, or nothing on earth shall induce me to become the wife of Reuben Marks. There is a crown piece, Ben. Do not forget that you are always to be on the watch, and tell me everything that happens."

The boy took the money and glided out, and Laura rose and went down to her father's room. She found him poring over a number of writs, which he hastily put aside upon her entrance.

"What is it, Laura?" he said, mildly.

"I come to you for justice, and justice I will have. You promised me that Edward Fairchild should not be harmed, and you have broken your word to me."

"Edward Fairchild? What have I to do with him?" he said.

"You affect to know nothing about it, but you can not deceive me. You know, none so well as you, the nefarious plot by which he has been betrayed into the hands of his enemies."

"If he has blundered into any trap set for him, what is that to me, girl? I do not love him so well that I shall waste sympathy with him in his affliction. He has never done me any thing but evil."

"It was a dastardly and cruel act by which he was betrayed. No one with the slightest feeling of honor or sense of shame would have dared to do it."

"What do you mean?" cried Davidson. "You burst upon me without reason, and expect me to refute charges which I do not understand; I know nothing, absolutely nothing, of this man, Fairchild, and I order you not to speak of him again."

"Then let me explain. You know how I loathe the false principle of honor which forces the man who is insulted or who by chance provokes another, to meet him in deadly fight. But what would you think of a man, who, having sent a challenge and received a favorable reply, when he arrives upon the ground fires before the word?"

"A coward, by my life!" cried Davidson.

"True. And what would you think of him if, knowing that his antagonist stood in peril of the law, he sets an ambush of ten soldiers to overpower him and his companion before he had time to fire a shot?"

"A soulless coward; a creature without a claim to the name of man," he answered, sternly.

"I am glad you have the grace to say so. Then, I tell you

that this man, whom you have chosen for my husband, and that miserable coward whom you call Captain Skeene, fearing to meet this brave man boldly, have betrayed him in the manner of which I speak."

"Laura, as Heaven is my witness, I knew nothing of this. I will tell you the truth. Marks did speak to me of some plan he had formed for the capture of Allen and Fairchild, but he did not tell me what it was, as I said that I had given you my word not to harm him. If he has done this, it was a villainous act; I care not who is guilty of it."

"Thank you; it does my heart good to hear you speak like that. I tell you, now, that I withdraw my promise to marry Reuben Marks until this brave young man is again at liberty. From this hour I keep my room until from my window I can see him walking the streets of Bennington a free man"

"Would you destroy me?"

"I have no choice. Justice shall be done, though the heavens fall! Tell Marks not to attempt to see me, for it is useless."

She hurried out and went at once to her room, where she waited anxiously for the return of Reuben Marks. He came, at last, with an expression of elation upon his sallow face, and after a time a servant came up with an order, not a request, that she would come down. She sent back a refusal, and immediately after heard their heavy steps upon the stairs and a knock at her door.

"What do you want?" she said.

"Open the door, Laura, I wish to see you at once," replied her father's voice.

"Are you alone?"

"No, my darling," replied the shrill voice of Marks; "open the door, for I have news for you."

"I will not open it."

"Stand away from the door, Marks," hissed the sheriff. "I'll open it—with a vengeance!"

As he spoke, a panel was kicked in, and the door half forced from its hinges. Another blow, and the shattered fragments fell into the room, and the two men strode in.

"What do you mean by this disobedience, Laura? I sent for you to come down," cried Davidson.

"And I refused to come. You may tell that grinning demon by your side how I abhor him, and what I have said to you. I will not consent even to save you, until Edward Fairchild is free!"

"You take a great interest in that young man," said Marks, quietly.

"I do. He is worth a thousand such wretches as you."

"Complimentary to me or to him—which is it?"

"To *you*; I was wrong. He is worth a million such men as you."

"This must end, now and forever, Laura Davidson," said Marks, throwing off his sneering manner. "By some means, no matter how, you have discovered that young Fairchild is again a prisoner. You say that he shall be set at liberty; I say he shall not. Now let us see who wins."

He came nearer as he spoke, and she raised her hand which was beneath the table and showed a loaded pistol.

"Stand back! If you come nearer I shall fire!"

"I will leave you with the girl," said Marks, turning to Davidson. "Tell her all and keep nothing back. Let us see if that will tame her spirit."

The man went slowly out, casting a look of intense malignity at the brave woman as he passed over the shattered door—a look so terrible that even her true heart gave a great throb. Father and daughter were all alone, and what passed in that room no man can tell, but the servants told afterward that, while the interview was going on, Marks sat in Davidson's dining-room, chuckling and hugging himself in ecstasy, as if conscious of his power. He heard steps upon the stairs, and Davidson came in, leading his daughter by the hand.

"She has yielded," he said, "and she is yours. Beware how you taunt her with this when she is your wife."

Marks said nothing, but sat looking at the pair in silence. There were traces of tears upon the cheeks of Laura, and the eyes of Davidson were not dry.

"I have given^d up the struggle," said Laura, in a hard, dry tone. "I wish to have it understood that it is not fear of what

you can say or do which forces me to take this step. You are hateful to me and always will be, but I can save my father, and I will."

"You hear her, Davidson," said Marks. "Have you any thing to say why I should not crush you to the earth?"

"Do your pleasure, Marks. I can not control a woman's tongue, and she has no reason to love you. Let her go back to her room now."

"Wait!" demanded Marks. "I have something more to say to her. You must fix a day, and an early one, when we are to be married, when I am to be made the happiest man on earth. He! he! he!"

"Let it be when you please," replied Laura, faintly. "Since I am to make the sacrifice, I will make it at once. I leave all to you and my father."

"Do you wish a public ceremony?"

"Oh, no, no."

"Bridemaids?"

"No."

"Then we will arrange it. I do not think of anything more I wish to say to you now."

She went out, and Davidson stood with one hand upon the table, looking at his prospective son-in-law.

"This is a wicked thing, Marks—a bad, cruel thing."

"You think so?"

"Do not you?"

"I meant it to be cruel; I meant to torture her. Has she not shown her petty spite and hatred of me in a hundred ways, lately, ever since she promised to marry me? Has she not driven me nearly mad by her unconcealed regard for this wretch, Fairchild, who is now in my power? She shall be at the trial; she shall bear witness against him, and when he stands at the gallows foot, she shall be there to see."

"Be careful what you say, Marks. By Heaven! you shall not wrong her too much. If you do, you make an enemy of me. Hark!"

A sullen and fast-increasing roar began to rise in the street. Davidson darted to the window and looked out, and saw men running madly to and fro, and the clatter of preparation sounded in the streets.

"The Green-Mountain Boys are up," cried Davidson. "What are they after now? As I live, they are attacking your house, Marks."

"I expected it, when that cursed Allen escaped. What are they doing?"

"Here is Allen at their head, and they are marching up to the door. Hear those cries, Reuben. It will not do for you to fall alive into their hands."

"Down with the liar and villain! To the gallows with Reuben Marks! Send him back to New York in a coat of tar and feathers! Come out, come out!" roared the mob.

"They want to see you very much, Reuben," said Davidson, with a grim smile. "There goes Allen."

A gigantic figure darted up the steps, with an ax in his hand. Thundering blows sounded on the door and it went down with a crash, and over it poured the Green-Mountain Boys, mad for vengeance.

They darted to and fro in the house, searched every nook and cranny, but of course without success.

"They will be here next," said Davidson. "Some of them are pointing this way already."

"Hide me," panted Marks. "Allen would kill me if he took me now. Don't look at me in that way, Sam Davidson. I know you would be pleased to see me dead, but I shall not die alone."

"Come with me," said Davidson. "I will conceal you."

Five minutes after the men were at Davidson's door, clamoring for Marks. The sheriff went out to meet them.

"What now, Ethan Allen? I think your life is in sufficient peril already without adding to your danger."

"We want that perjured and dastardly villain, Reuben Marks, and are credibly informed that he is in your house."

"He was here, five minutes ago, but he is not here now," replied Davidson. "He heard your roaring in the street, and saw the riotous attack upon his house, and escaped by the back way."

"Run to the back of the house, some of you!" roared Allen. "Now, sir, with your permission, and in behalf of the committee of safety, we will search the house."

"I know of old how useless it is to speak of law to you, Allen. Do as you will."

A dozen men, including Remember Baker and Seth Warner, hurried in, and the house was searched from top to bottom, but no trace of the man they sought was to be found. They did not enter Laura's room, but Warner went to the door and looked in, satisfying himself by a glance that the villain was not there. They came down considerably crest-fallen, and reported to Allen.

"The rascal has taken wing," said Allen. "Take ten men and scour the country in the direction of Skeensboro', Seth, and if you find him, bring him to Bennington. I will make an example of him to all traitors and cowards."

Allen himself, with thirty mounted men, left Bennington in half an hour's time. They were all fully armed, and evidently meant business. Hardly were they out of the town when Davidson went down to the wine vault, took several stones from the wall behind the casks, and released Marks, who was hidden there.

"Have they gone?" he gasped.

"Yes, your neck is safe for the present. How long it will remain so is a matter of doubt."

"Do you think it safe for me to come up-stairs?"

"Hardly, at present. I have no doubt the spies of Allen are on the watch, for they suspect me. If we do any thing, it must be at night."

"I shall get away safely," said Marks, in a spiteful tone. "Once in York colony, I will make these scoundrels suffer for what they have done to me. I will have that Allen's neck in a noose, in three months' time."

"I hope you may. Now tell me what you wish to have me do."

"Send Ben down to Lynch's, and order him to get horses ready at once. Tell him to find Tom Stacey, to help us off, and to ride with us as guard. Go to your daughter and tell her that to-night we leave this accursed colony forever, and when it is dark, and the house is clear, let me know."

The preparations were made in silence and secrecy. Darkness came—the darkest night that ever dawned upon Bennington. Under this black shroud three figures stole out of Davidson's

house and reached the forest where Ned was first captured. Horses were waiting at this point, and the party mounted, a shudder passing through the frame of Laura as Marks touched her hand in assisting her to reach the saddle. Their course was necessarily slow, and it was made in darkness. No one spoke, for it was not a time to waste words. Laura felt that she was leaving all that was dear to her, and going to a captivity worse than the Bastile, but she did not falter.

After two hours' ride they reached a farm-house beside a running stream. The party halted, and Marks went to the door and rapped. It was opened, and a short conference ensued.

"Alight," said Marks. "This gentleman, a justice of the peace, will give us shelter until we can proceed. Justice Harebell, this is my friend Samuel Davidson, of Bennington."

"I am charmed to know you, sir. I am a new man here, you will understand, and for that reason am not well acquainted with the prominent men of this section."

He assisted Laura to alight, and led her into the house, while a negro boy led away the horses. Laura, looking at this man, saw in the reception-room that the visit did not take him entirely by surprise. Marks had laid his plans beforehand.

CHAPTER XIII.

JUSTICE CLAIMS HER DUES.

THE justice called Harebell might have been a man of the highest morals, with the kindest heart that beats in the human bosom, but, if he was, then his face was woefully against him. He was one of those lean-visaged, twinkling-eyed men who take delight in the acquisition of wealth, and are not particularly anxious as to the manner in which such wealth is acquired. His bead-like eyes twinkled as he saw the face of Laura, and he hastened to bring her a chair.

"Sit down, Miss; make yourself as comfortable as you

can," he said. "My wife has gone to prepare a room for you."

Laura, with little wish to converse, was pleased when Mrs. Harebell, a hard-featured, masculine-looking woman, made her appearance and announced that the room was ready for her. The moment Laura was gone, the justice obeyed a signal from Marks and followed him out of the room.

"I expect you to perform the marriage ceremony for me in the morning, and it will be for your interest not to ask too many questions, or notice the appearance of the bride."

"I understand that," said Harebell. "May and December don't go well together. You may trust me."

"Are you on the watch? Have you seen Skeene and his soldiers on the way to Skeensboro' with a prisoner?"

"Yes; they passed here yesterday about three o'clock. I heard Skeene say he was going to camp one day on Beaver Creek, for a day's fishing."

"What! Do you tell me that he is fool enough to camp for an hour longer than is necessary in these Grants? If it were not for setting Ned Fairchild at liberty, I should wish that Allen might catch him."

"Perhaps he will. Ethan passed here yesterday on a keen jump, with about thirty Green-Mountain Boys behind him. They asked about Skeene, too, but *I hadn't seen him.*"

"That fool ought to be hung. If he knew any thing he would be in York colony now, with his prisoner. If they do catch him, and don't lace his hide with a hickory, I shall never forgive them."

Morning came, and when Laura appeared her father started at the sight of her wan face, and called Marks out of the house.

"Have some pity, Reuben. You know that I love my daughter, and I can not bear to see her pale face. I will give you a deed of gift of one-half my property if you will give her up."

"No," snarled Marks.

"You had better do it. The girl will go crazy. She trembles like an aspen when you touch her, and her face is ghastly pale. Pity her and set her free."

"You are wasting time, man. She must marry me this morning."

"You will not give her up, then?" said Davidson, despairingly.

"Not I; I stand here on my bond. Give me your daughter or the law your life. The choice is before you; take which you will."

Davidson bowed his head, and turned away, and Marks strode into the house, where he surprised Laura by telling her that they were to be married that morning. She listened to him with as little feeling as a marble image, for she was so stunned by the unalterable fate before her, that she had not even the power to resist.

"I'll be married outside," cried Marks. "Bring up the horses and let us ride out. Harebell, you old skinflint, get your horse and come with us."

"What spirits he has!" chuckled Harebell—"a very pleasant fellow."

"Ain't I? Ha! ha! ha! you don't half know me, you false-swearer—not half! We will ride out, and I'll be married underneath the greenwood tree, like the men and maidens of bold Robin Hood."

"Take care some of the Green-coats don't happen in upon you, that's all!" said Harebell, as they mounted.

"Who cares for Ethan Allen and his ragamuffins?" shrieked Marks.

"He has been drinking," whispered Laura to her father "Oh, my God! must I marry such a man as this?"

"He is a villain," groaned Davidson. "Wait a little, and I will save you if I can."

He repented his bargain already, for his love for Laura was nearly as great as his love of life. They rode on under the bending boughs, by gleaming brooks, bright rivers, and tumbling waterfalls, in the fresh sweet air of that delicious climate, and Laura felt its influence. Harebell might refuse to marry them, her father might repent, and help might come in a hundred ways. They passed through a circle of green trees and stood in a little sheltered nook by the river-side—one of God's own temples.

"Halt here!" cried Marks. "This is the very place. Dis-

mount, everybody. I am about to complete the happiness of my life."

"Father," whispered Laura, "do not let him touch me."

Davidson sprung down, and stood between Marks and his daughter, though the lawyer glared at him with ferocious eyes.

"Stand out of the way, father-in-law. Let me help my fair bride to alight."

"Don't touch her!" said Davidson. "She does not wish you to come near her. How dare you drink so much wine, to-day of all days."

"Drink! I'll be a hog, if I choose, and swill it. Wine makes the old man young, and the poor forget his trouble. I will wallow in wine if I choose."

"Then my daughter shall not marry you while you are in this state."

"What did you say? *Shall* not? I'll let you know that she shall do just as I say."

"She shall not!"

"Do you want to die, Sam Davidson? Get out of the way, or I'll know the reason."

He was sober enough now, and his eyes were full of fury, as he laid his claw-like hand upon Davidson's shoulder to push him aside. The sheriff threw his grasp off so fiercely that he staggered and fell to the ground, from which he rose with a face whose savage look was frightful.

"You have done it once too often, my friend," he said. "Murderer, do you see these?"

He took some papers from the breast of his coat and shook them in the face of the sheriff, who grappled with him fiercely. "Give them up!" he shrieked. "I will have them."

Laura stood appalled, unable to help her father, and not knowing what to do. The lawyer seemed gifted with unnatural strength, but in the end he went down, with Davidson's knee upon his breast. One by one the claw-like talons were unclasped from the papers, and still keeping his enemy down, Davidson began to tear them in pieces with his teeth, while the yells of rage on the part of Marks were fearful.

At last the work was done, and the small fragments of papers, scattered here and there by the wind, were all that remained of the proofs against Davidson, who now leaped to his feet.

"Now, dog, coward, thief! I defy you. Marry my daughter to you! *Never!*"

"You have destroyed the proofs of your guilt," hissed Marks, "but I will proclaim it to the world."

"Proclaim it then! I will say that you lie," replied Davidson, "and everybody knows you are the king of liars and scoundrels."

Quick as thought Reuben Marks thrust his hand into his bosom, and when he drew it out it held a long double-barreled pistol, its bright barrel gleaming in the sunlight. Davidson rushed at him as the pistol cracked, and Laura saw her father stagger, but the next moment they were locked in a death-grapple.

Close beside them a creek ran through a deep gully, but the bed of the stream was nearly bare. Upon the brink of this chasm, two hundred feet deep, the men fought for life or death. Not a word was spoken and nothing heard save the deep breathing of the combatants. The blood was dropping from a deep wound in the breast of the sheriff, and a gray pallor was rapidly overspreading his face. Just then the beat of coming horses' hoofs was heard, and Marks began to cry for help at the top of his voice.

"Bah!" said Davidson, in a harsh, grating tone. "They can not get here in time, but will find your mangled body at the foot of the deep gully."

"Help, help!" screamed Marks. "This madman will murder me! Take him. Captain Maylie—the pirate, is here."

"Come, come," hissed Davidson. "You struggle in vain."

He forced him back, inch by inch, crying vainly for mercy. The horses' feet sounded nearer, and the struggles of the doomed man, were desperate, but could not compete with the maniac force of Davidson. They stood upon the verge of the cliff, and Marks had braced his foot desperately against a low shrub, when Ethan Allen, followed by Ned Fairchild and a strong party of Green-Mountain Boys, dashed into the glade.

“Take him!” screamed Marks, again. “Help! Captain Maylie, the pirate, who has been sought for far and near.”

A dozen men sprung from their saddles, but before they could reach the struggling pair the root gave way, and the sheriff, with Marks locked in his strong arms, fell into the gulf which yawned below. Laura uttered a gasping cry and would have fallen, but Edward Fairchild caught her in his arms.

The mountaineers clambered down the rocks and found the two lying in a ghastly heap, Marks underneath. As they lifted Davidson they felt his heart still beat, and upon raising Marks his head dropped helplessly to one side. His neck was broken, his limbs horribly mangled, and life and sense had departed forevermore. Choosing circuitous and rugged paths, the mountaineers carried the bodies of the two men up the slope and laid them down. As they did so Davidson opened his eyes, and stared wildly about him.

“Is he dead?” he whispered, as Ethan Allen bent over him.

“Yes.”

“Call Laura to me; I must speak to her.”

Laura was instantly kneeling by his side. “Put your hand in mine,” he gasped; “let me feel your presence near me as I die. Wicked as I have been, I have loved you, darling. Reuben Marks is dead, but I shall not be long behind him. The secret of his power was this. I was Captain Maylie, whom all men thought dead, long since, but who escaped by the aid of this dead clay beside me, and found a refuge in this country. Yes, the villain did not lie, for I was, Maylie, the pirate, Maylie, the outlaw, and he had the only proofs of my identity in his possession. Give me some drink.”

One of the mountaineers put a flask to his lips, and he drank a mouthful or two.

“You will go to my house, and in the cabinet you will find a secret drawer. Press the brass-headed nail in the woodwork on the left-hand side and the piece will drop out. There you will find my will and a paper. All I have is yours and it was honestly gained, so you may use it freely. When I escaped from England I had not a guinea in

the world, and what I have now I made in lawful traffic. My guilt was the guilt of thirty years ago. Can you forgive me?"

She stooped and kissed him.

"That is like you—that is like your mother. *She* only knew me under the name of Davidson, and thought me an honest trader. Reuben Marks was my lawyer in London and he alone knew my guilt."

He stopped, for an effusion of blood rushed into his throat. They gave him more wine and he revived.

"Take the paper which is with the will and carry it to Albany, to Walter Darrel who lives in State Street. He is your uncle, your mother's brother. The letter will tell him all, and for your mother's sake he will give you a refuge and a house. Edward Fairchild, come here."

Edward approached, with a sad look upon his face.

"You do not despise my daughter because her father is a villain?"

"I love her dearly," replied Fairchild. "I will prove it in the time to come."

"I believe you. Then to your hands I give her in charge. See her safely to her uncle's house, and when she is your wife—as she will be—never reproach her on my account. You promise this?"

"Upon my honor."

As the words were spoken, a strange peace fell upon the face of Samuel Davidson, or Stanhope Maylie, for that was his true name. His hands dropped nerveless on his breast, and they saw that his spirit had passed away.

It was a funeral procession which entered Bennington, that night, bearing the bodies, and the next day they were consigned to the earth, and were at rest.

Ethan Allen had overtaken the soldiers of Skeene, a few miles from the New York border, and had retaken Edward after a short struggle, in which only one man was hurt upon either side. Indeed, the soldiery had little sympathy with the cowardly trick by which he had been taken, and were only too ready to give him up. Skeene was dismissed with a grim warning never to show his face in the New-Hampshire Grants again. Within a month he sold out and returned to England.

Laura was accompanied by her lover as far as the New York border, but she would not let him enter the colony in which he was in so much danger.

Her uncle read the letter which had been written by Davidson in anticipation of any evil which might befall him, and gladly gave the daughter of a dearly-loved sister a home.

Here she remained until the troubles in the New-Hampshire Grants were superseded by the scenes of the Revolution. A year after this event, Edward Fairchild, now a major in the American army, made Laura his wife, and they went back to the Grants, happy in each other's love. He fought bravely throughout the long struggle, and came back at the end crowned with many honors, to live in peace in the country of his choice.

Lizzie Lyon married John Maltbe, and the two families lived side by side for many years.

The lawyer Marks had left no will, and a distant relative in London claimed and received his property, which was very large.

Justice Harebell received a severe flagellation with the "twigs of the wilderness," a week after the death of Davidson and Marks, and returned to New York, leaving his property in the New-Hampshire Grants, which went back to the rightful owner.

The Allens, Remember Baker, Seth Warner and the rest, belong to history. They fought manfully in the Revolution, and their names are held in veneration in the Green-Mountain State to this day.

And by the winter fires the old men tell of the times of which we write.

THE END.



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| California uncle. Three males and three females. | Mad with too much lore. For three males. |
| Be kind to the poor. A little folks' play. | The fairy's warning. Dress piece. For two girls. |
| How people are insured. A "duet." | Aunt Eunice's experiment. For several. |
| Mayor. Acting charade. For four characters. | The mysterious G. G. Two females and one male. |
| The smoke head. For four boys. | We'll have to mortgage the farm. For one male |
| A kindergarten dialogue. For a Christmas Festival. Personated by seven characters. | and two females. |
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| | The auction. For numerous characters. |

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| The wrong man. Three males and three females | An air castle. For five males and three females. |
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| Ned's present. For four boys. | and one boy. |
| Judge not. For teacher and several scholars. | The silly dispute. For two girls and teacher. |
| Telling dreams. For four little folks. | Not one there! For four male characters. |
| Saved by love. For two boys. | Foot-print. For numerous characters. |
| Mistaken identity. Two males and three females. | Keeping boarders. Two females and three males. |
| Couldn't read English. For 3 males and 1 female. | A cure for good. One lady and two gentlemen. |
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| 'Sold.' For three boys. | |

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| Little Red Riding Hood. For two children. | Too much for Aunt Matilda. For three females. |
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| Evidence enough. For two males. | The double stratagem. For four females. |
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| Waterfall. For several. | For four males. |

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| The Dark Cupid; or, the Mi takes of a Morning. For three gentlemen and two ladies. | Titania's Banquet. For a number of girls. |
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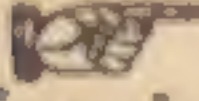
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